THE EXQUISITE GIFT

ELLA BELL WALLIS

DESIGN
OF THE
JACKET

By
THOREAU
MacDONALD

The
Exquisite
Gift

PRICE
$2.00

THE EXQUISITE GIFT

THE EXQUISITE GIFT

by

ELLA BELL WALLIS

ARISTON
PUBLISHERS LIMITED
OTTAWA · CANADA

Copyright 1930
ARISTON PUBLISHERS LIMITED

To the memory of my aunt,
Margaret Bell Wartman.

PART I

THE VIRGIN

"Thou art wrapt as with a shroud,
Thou art gathered in a cloud."

I

The forest lay upon the land like the hand of God; like the divine hand when it is pleased to be heavy upon man. It was as if the settlers must wrestle for their fields with God Himself, as if God, in His divine passion for purity, would have kept His earth in perpetual virginity, unsullied, unused.

It may have been this disposition of the divine mind toward the settlers that made their lives so hard. Their struggle against the forest was body-breaking. For the greater part of the trees were giant-sized and of wood so hard that muscles as well as axes need be of steel to bring them down. And when the tree was down and a man ran with sweat and his muscles stung as if he had been lashed, there was still the great-pronged root to be torn out of the ground. Incredible expenditure of strength and life to clear one small field!

God had placed a high price upon the land and there was no evading payment. The price was human lives and for the most part women paid it. Three mothers, they had learned there in Ontario, it often required to raise one family. For it was only full young strength and courage that was equal to the demands made upon the wives of the men who had set about wresting land from the forest. At eighteen, or younger, the women were wives and mothers, at twenty-five they were worn, at thirty breaking fast, and at thirty-five so often broken. But their ranks were almost always filled again, and a strong and united front was as before presented to the forest and, it seemed sometimes, to God as well.

Rhoda Canniff stood at the head of the graves of the two mothers of William Botts's family. The third was required and it was she who must meet the need, for, although she was the same age as the women who lay in the graves at her feet, she was still in her full strength. Like God she had always loved purity, and like the land she was filled with virginal strength.

It may have been that Rhoda's virginal sense

derived from the primeval scene. Unravished land, silent forest, pure air, and blue sky possessed the earth as at the moment of creation. And so Rhoda's world held itself always a little aloof from man but at certain times it was tranced in an ecstasy virginal in its apartness from the mood of man. Those were the moments of utter stainlessness in winter, of tender green gleaming in spring, of richness and fruition in summer, of burning splendour in the first days of autumn. And then came a still, pallid time when the earth brooded upon the mystery of recurrent life, how within its own wan and stricken body lay enfolded all the fulness and the glory of spring and summer. In that wan, dim time Rhoda read a spirit of resignation and of faith, and like another virgin she kept secretly in her heart the things in which she sensed a holy mystery. They were stored within her in what she conceived of as an immaculate chamber where was a luminous presence she thought was purity, or God, for to her mind He was a white-flaming purity that had consumed the dross of her fleshly state. There she cloistered away her virginity of body and soul from intimate contact

with her fellow creatures, for she was possessed of a passion for utter purity.

But there had been guests of earth in Rhoda's immaculate chamber. When Angeline Shipley and Sarah Crosby were still as single in heart as she herself, there had been hushed and holy communion in it. It was at their graves Rhoda now stood, for they had been the two mothers whose lives had been given in William Botts's struggle to found a house against which the forest could not prevail. But Rhoda felt that, while Angeline and Sarah had given their lives in the cause which Rhoda felt was universal and therefore sacred, though they had given their lives, it had not been required of them to serve the time at such a cost to themselves as was now asked of her. Death had not been too bitter a thing to either Angeline or Sarah. Each had felt her strength was all but gone and, knowing it, had lacked courage to face life longer, realizing what the struggle with the forest would mean without sufficient strength. Then, too, as they lay dying, Angeline and Sarah had both felt at ease concerning their families. For Angeline had known that Sarah

would be wife and mother in her place and after, Sarah had been assured that Rhoda would not fail her. Both had been buried beneath the serene maple in the front yard, not because, as was sometimes the case with dying mothers, Angeline and Sarah had felt that in this nearness their children would be not quite so motherless, but because Rhoda had wished them to lie in a familiar spot. Her own sense of separation, she thought, might not, then, be quite so sharp.

Rhoda, Angeline and Sarah had been more than friends from childhood. As children their lives had been warm and sweet and bright chiefly because of each other. It had turned the dark hush of the woods into a spell of enchantment to walk there together; and the presence of each other had made the long school day not only less tedious but something to look forward to. And when, in the unending winter, there being no school in the very severe weather, one of them paid another an over-night visit, it had created an island of summer in the very midst of snow and bleakness. Not one of them had ever forgotten the glowing and trembling with which these visits had been anticipated. It

had been as if a visitor of dazzling brightness had graciously consented to sojourn for a time upon a dark planet. For, though Rhoda, Angeline, and Sarah had never thought of being other than content with their lot, life, in winter, had been extremely circumscribed and tended to become monotonous when the emphasis fell almost entirely, from day to day, upon carding, spinning, weaving, knitting, and sewing. But even these familiar activities had taken on a new and interesting character during one of these bright visitations.

And years, though they calmed the ecstasy with which each looked forward to seeing the other two, had strenghtened the bond uniting Rhoda, Angeline, and Sarah. It was like that with pioneer women. There were peculiarly deep and lasting and tender relationships among them. As with Rhoda, Angeline, and Sarah, these had their beginning in childhood when the lightness and brightness of each other's freedom from the weight of responsibility and life shone into their lives like a rosy light. And then, with the years, the completeness of their understanding of each other's lives, their intuition that the

daily struggle must be blessed with something against which physical adversity could not prevail, these made themselves into bonds of respect, devotion and tenderness which richly and warmly bound their lives together. And so Rhoda, Angeline, and Sarah had honoured as well as loved one another. They saw each other full of virtue, for to them virtue largely consisted in forwarding the process of life. That conviction was deep in them as in all pioneer women; it cast a dimly perceived halo over life at its barest and hardest. It was the will of God that one generation should pass away and another come to serve the abiding earth.

Rhoda had not felt called to serve the process of life in the same way as other women. She had never withheld herself in the general cause, which was as sacred to her as to any. It was rather that the way of life which her spirit had imposed upon her had spared her body much. She had always been all but indispensable in her parents' home and then in the homes of her relatives and neighbours. She nursed mothers and babies, she cared for the greater number of the cases of small-pox, she brought

children through fevers and infantile diseases, and she had even been successful in some cases of surgery where there had been no hand but hers sure and ready and tender enough to use the scissors or knife or saw. When an overworked mother got hopelessly behind with her spinning and weaving, Rhoda went to help her and there was no woman in the community who spun more evenly or who wove a firmer piece of cloth than she did. And she was as capable of preparing and did prepare as good a meal as any woman with a family of her own to cook for.

Rhoda had not wished to have a home of her own. Not that she did not feel it a sacred place. She felt this so deeply that in one case at least she had not allowed death to enter a home to ravish it. She had been nursing a sick neighbour who, it seemed to Rhoda, was letting herself slip away from her home and family and would not summon the energy and determination necessary to keep herself alive and bring back her strength. Rhoda had had a doctor brought from a distance, but he found the patient's case almost hopeless. She was too

weak, he thought, to rally. When he had gone, Rhoda went into the sick room. "Amelia," she said firmly, a note of severity in her voice, "you must not die and leave your children. There isn't any person to take your place just now. You must rally. I will go and boil you a couple of fresh eggs. You must eat them and you must get your strength back." Under Rhoda's command the patient rallied and as Rhoda had foreseen, in time had again taken her old place in life.

But, while Rhoda believed that it was according to God's plan that most women should be wives and mothers, she could not bear to think of herself as a wife. She could not bear that any man should look upon her as Adam had upon Eve and say: This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She wished to move through life rather as if she were a guest having come from afar than as a native of the earth. She desired for herself a chaste and starry isolation of body and spirit. She could draw near to women and children without a sense of despoliation, for children were utterly virginal like herself and, it seemed to her, wo-

men, even when contented wives and mothers, always thought more or less wistfully of their virginal life. Then, too, her soul demanded its moments of ecstasy; and spiritual isolation, she thought, was necessary to it. She had not been able to conceive of the soul experiencing such an isolation when the body could be claimed by another. She felt certain that her soul could no longer pursue its starry, solitary way if any fellow creature could say of her: This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh.

Rhoda laid the handfuls of delicate wood-flowers which she had brought upon the graves. Looking at Angeline's, because of what was in her mind to-day, she felt again that sensation of desecration which had filled her when she had first seen a look of shy tenderness pass between Angeline and William Botts. It was as if a shining angel had fallen. She had thought that both Angeline and Sarah had, like herself, recognized the holy uniqueness of the virginal life. But while Angeline and Sarah had always seemed sadly like fallen angels to Rhoda, they had remained inexpressibly dear to her. For, it was not because Rhoda lacked a sense of

companionship that she had thought the best way of life was the solitary pilgrimage. She had felt that their common spiritual sense would pierce their spiritual isolation uniting them in spirit, as the soul, though humbly apart from the glory of God, still felt itself one with Him. This vision of life had at once satisfied Rhoda's sense and desire of spiritual glory and her human tenderness. For Rhoda was filled with tenderness toward all that had need of her. It was as if it satisfied an appetite in her to serve women, children, young animals and old people. Men rarely had need of what she had to give them and for that reason, in a great measure, she had grown apart from them, had held her life aloof from theirs.

Angeline and Sarah had not thought that any man had ever asked Rhoda to be his wife. They had talked of it in hushed tones as if it were almost a sacrilege to discuss her intimate concerns, and they had come to the conclusion that the men who knew Rhoda, sensing her chaste spirit, had stood in awe of her. The clear white flame of her spirituality had not appealed to them. The women they desired flamed more

rosily, if less purely, and there was more ease and human pleasure to be had with them. But Angeline and Sarah had not felt that Rhoda's purer spirituality had separated between them, although they had known her way was not theirs and had felt that because of the closeness of their contact with the earth, they had become a little mingled with its material things, that, while the thread of their lives had become inextricably twisted in and out of the daily round, she had kept the strands of her life in her own hands to a greater extent, and the texture of her life was in consequence a more delicate and lovely thing.

Angeline, the gentlest and most timid of the three, and because of that gentleness and timidity a little nearer to Rhoda than Sarah had at first been, would not have had the courage to ask Rhoda to take her place as wife and mother. But it had not been necessary to do so, for Sarah was newly widowed when Angeline lay dying, and so she had spoken to William and to Sarah of her hope that the two families would be united. But when, a few years later, Sarah lay as Angeline had, and knew that she was going

soon, she faced a more difficult problem. She could not bear to leave her children to the care of any other woman than Rhoda and yet how could she ask Rhoda to take her place and Angeline's. In the end, as Angeline had done, Sarah had spoken to William about what, for the children's sake, it would be necessary for him to do, and her mother's heart stayed itself on Rhoda though she did not tell her so.

And now Rhoda felt as keenly as Sarah had done that she must fill the empty place of wife and mother. For Rhoda had loved each of Angeline's and Sarah's children from the moment her hands had received them into this world. It had seemed to satisfy her own maternal instinct that her dear friends should have brought children into the world. And the maternal instinct was strong in Rhoda: it was that which filled her with tenderness toward everything that needed her. She could not have endured any more than the mothers themselves that Angeline's or Sarah's children should be given to another woman than herself. She would marry William and secure the children for her own, though she must lose her virginal

apartness from the common way of life in doing so.

Rhoda had never cared to discover of what the relations, less than spiritual, between man and woman consisted. She had never cared to know whether or not the love between them was a mingling of a strange, sweet frenzy of physical passion and a harmony of intellect and emotion, or if it were some rare ethereal essence arbitrarily manipulated by fate. When Angeline had blushed when William Botts looked at her, and when Sarah's calm depths had been disturbed by Henry Pearce's glance, Rhoda had deeply regretted their lost singleness of heart and the lessened glory of the vision of their destiny. It had always seemed highly significant to Rhoda that authority had said there would be no giving in marriage in heaven: her instinct, she felt, was born of the truth. But now, for the first time in her life, Rhoda felt uncertain and confused regarding her own soul and its destiny. How were her nature and the common lot of woman to be reconciled?

It was not that Rhoda thought of William Botts as other than a good man, one to be highly

respected. He had been a good husband to Angeline and to Sarah and he had been the best of fathers to his own children and to those of Sarah and Henry Pearce as well. But Rhoda did not want a husband. It seemed to her that utter spiritual purity demanded a corresponding physical chastity, and her sense and desire of the glory which came with spiritual uniqueness and exaltation rebelled at being cheated of it.

Rhoda turned toward Sarah's grave. The sad, low mound of earth was still damp and dark. A keener, fresher grief flowed over Rhoda as she looked at it. Angeline's grave evoked within her now a deep, mournful sense of a sweetness that had faded out of life rather than a present and poignant desolation. For, though once, because she had been weaker in all things than herself, Angeline had been dearer to her than Sarah, now Sarah's loss thrust more deeply and more keenly into her heart than Angeline's death had done. The added years of life with their store of mutual needs, trust, and devotion had left behind them a residue precious indeed among those things which lay treasured at the core of Rhoda's being. As life

had gone on she had seen how Sarah had been better fitted than either Angeline or herself to meet it, to take from it with greater calm its gifts both sweet and bitter, and render to it with a more open hand and yet at less loss to herself what it demanded from her and hers. There had grown up within Rhoda a deepening respect for and devotion to Sarah as she had seen how calmly and yet how surely and how firmly she wove the threads of life into a pattern of simple harmonies. For, though William's first sweet, radiant love had been given to Angeline, and at her death fragrance and light had seemed to go out of his life, Sarah had in time made him both content and quietly happy. And now, even though she had felt that she must marry William to secure the children to herself, Rhoda would have felt all but compelled to do what she knew Sarah had felt necessary to the best welfare of the three families in William Botts's home. Sarah's deepest purpose in life had been to blend the three families into one and she had accomplished her aim, she had thought, because of the closeness of the tie between herself and each family. It had seemed to her practical mind that

none but their father's wife could have come so near to his children as she had done. And so she had felt that Rhoda, like herself, should be brought close to the children through the father as well as through the mothers. And Rhoda, while she did not feel that she could be brought closer to the children than she had always been, hesitated to go contrary to Sarah's conviction.

Rhoda thought of the children. She knew each one of them as intimately as its own mother had. Her hand had received them into the world and clothed and cared for them almost equally with their mothers'. She had nursed them through their childish illnesses, had contrived their playthings, had filled the pure emptiness of their minds with things sweet and holy, and had doubly loved them, because they were Angeline's and Sarah's children and because they were innocence made flesh. Life had nothing rarer to offer her than the office of mother to those children if she had not had to become a wife as well.

With that mingled sense of despoliation and enrichment upon her, standing under the serene

maple, Rhoda accepted her lot. In bitterness of spirit, which she knew she dare not and would not cherish as a sad remembrance of lost ecstasy, she prepared to close the door of that inner, immaculate chamber and enter upon the common way of life.

II

William Botts wrestled with the only stump remaining in the field he had himself cleared. He had had help with his other fields; his neighbours had worked with him on them as he had helped with theirs, but he had done all the clearing of this one himself. It meant a great deal to him. His neighbours had thought the land a little swampy there and had advised against cutting off the timber. But William, seeing how deep and rich the soil was, and thinking that in a year when there was a little less than the usual amount of rain, it would be a good thing to have a low-lying field to sow, had worked on it himself, and now he had his three acres of deep rich land that was almost free of stones. That was a great consideration, for much of the country about was hilly and the plough kept forever turning up stones which had to be picked off, and that was back-breaking work.

William let his axe rest upon the ground as he looked at his field. His deep satisfaction with the work of his hands was like a mild light upon his face. He seemed to grow rested and content as his eyes travelled over the dark glistening surface of the newly-sown land. For, although this last stump had remained, William had sown the ground. As he pictured a fine stand of grain upon it, now blue-green like a lake and then pale-gold like nothing else that William had ever seen, the heavy lines in his face became a little less deep.

The field was open on only one side, the green bulk of the forest all but surrounding it. William's eyes rested thoughtfully upon the massed branches and bright spring greenery. He would clear a few acres more even if it were a little low, and swampy in places. There was no land about so rich and moist, and summers came now and then with too much heat and too little rain. In such a season fields like this would produce more than a greater number of acres of higher land. Then, too, there were not so many beech and maple trees just there, and William always suffered more or less when he

cut down a magnificent beech or maple. It seemed to him that a finer destiny awaited them than to meet the same end as common, stunted pine. And so William had preserved, as far as he could, the finest beech and maple trees which grew on the higher ground. The time would come, he believed, when the farmers would be glad to avail themselves of their splendid wood and those magnificent trees would then become something more permanent and more intimately connected with men's lives than if their ashes were converted into a little potash or pearlash. Of course those great hardwood trees made better potash and pearlash than did the pines and tamaracks, but nevertheless he would spare them whenever he could. Although there were few ways of getting hold of any money except by the sale of potash and pearlash, still he would try not to make a great deal, for they got along very well without much money: Sarah was a shrewd contriver of necessities. William's eyes suddenly withdrew themselves from the massed green of the forest. He had remembered that Sarah was no longer in the house but lay in the grave beside Angeline's. William could see

the two graves, low and sad, sheltered by the great maple which, because of its height and depth and breadth, was almost always profoundly tranquil. Thought of the two graves brought Rhoda Canniff to his mind for it was she who had had them placed there. She was now caring for the children and looking after the house.

William took up his axe as if it had suddenly become heavier. Yes, Sarah was dead and he had promised her to ask Rhoda Canniff to be his wife and the children's mother. He felt a slight lightening of the sudden weight within as he thought that certainly no better mother than Rhoda could be found for his children; he doubted if even their own mothers would have made them happier as children or finer and stronger men and women. For he and Angeline and Sarah had often wondered how it was that she could be at the same time so tender and yet exacting with the children. It was perhaps, he thought, because, while she loved them so deeply, her standard of character was very high and she could not betray it. And so William knew that as a mother Rhoda would be

more than he had a right to expect, but it would be hard for him to think of himself as her husband.

Life had not spared to William much of the freshness and sweetness of youth, but there still lingered within him a faint shadow and breath of the dreamy romanticism which had been his natal gift. And it was this in William that rejected the thought of living in intimacy with Rhoda. Instinctively he felt that the keen white flame of her chaste spirit would forever deaden the faint glow within him, and while living hand in hand with hard reality, he had felt vaguely that it had been a soft inner gleaming that had made bearable the closeness and frequent bleakness of his contact with reality.

The first sweet expression of that romance in William's nature had been his love for Angeline. They had been very much alike, both of a gentle nature, shyly hiding away in a sweet secrecy a rose-tinted sense of romance. A deep content had possessed him when he knew that Angeline loved him, and their life together had been like a smooth-bedded stream, only its surface had been subject to disturbance or shadow.

It seemed as if the harmony of their natures and the softened light which their sense of romance threw over their lives were proof against the coldest and hardest of realities, and they might have been if they had been put to the test. But Angeline's physical strength had failed their love and William was left alone, like a child for whom the sudden dark has destroyed the bright and grateful familiarity about him.

William had not found it too difficult to accept Sarah as his wife. She had been of a comfortable, sympathetic and practical nature. And she had been bereaved as he had; she had known that there was within him as within herself that which was sealed away from everyone, and she had left him alone with his hidden shrine. She had made no demand upon him; but gradually, because she had made much of their common interests, presenting them in a cheerful light, infusing value into them, they had filled his life with purpose and cheerfulness, and William had found that Sarah had made no small place for herself in his heart.

But it would be a far different thing to share his life with Rhoda. It would not be that she

would share his life: he would share hers. For Rhoda was like a city set upon a hill, that cannot be hid. Her white light pierced all darkness and darkened all other lights. That faint glow from the embers of his distant but still sweet romance, which had kept his inner self alive in the midst of death, would surely be utterly quenched if he lived day after day close to Rhoda. He would have to live by her light in as much as he was able.

There was yet in William, despite the desolation of his life, a strong will to live and be himself. It would still be worthwhile to express that which was in him in his own way, even if it were only in the doing of humble things such as clearing the land and sowing fields. Like God, William loved to look upon the work of his hands and find it good. Good work gave life pattern and purpose. But he wished to direct his own labours, to feel that the inspiration had risen in himself, that he was still sufficiently alive and receptive of God's will to work out small and simple devices fitting into the divine and universal pattern. It would be worthwhile having endured to do this.

William walked slowly across the field to the edge of the woods. The air was heavy with the spiciness of the evergreens. There was much beauty here among the tamaracks and cedars although there was not the stately magnificence of the maple and beech forests. William looked at the tamaracks and was touched by the soft grace of their fine, feathery green. Nevertheless they would have to come down and, perhaps feeling the act would commit him to the work, he raised his axe and sank it deep into the trunk of the nearest tamarack. He took another and still another bite out of the fresh, yellow wood and then his thoughts again arrested his axe.

There was little doubt that Rhoda would consent to become his wife. William knew her too well to think that she would hesitate to make the sacrifice. He fully realized that a very great sacrifice was being demanded of her: he understood something of what it would mean to Rhoda to submit herself to the common lot of woman; like other men William had realized and stood in awe of her sense of immaculacy.

William felt that he must somehow be out of line with that harmonious order of things which,

despite his bereavements, he sensed in life; it was so obviously Rhoda's destiny to remain apart from much of life. She drew her fulness of life from purer sources than most.

William scarcely knew whether his own or Rhoda's lot was less to be preferred. But he knew that Rhoda, while it would be a bitter thing to her to leave her heights, had within her such spiritual strength and self-confidence that in time to come she would regain perhaps all her serenity and her belief in her high destiny. With himself it would be different; he did not draw his life from such depths of being as did Rhoda and, living within the shadow of her greater spirit, his own would ultimately lose its identity.

Perhaps his fields might repay some part of the devotion he had lavished upon them; if he lived close to them he might retain a little of his old self and spirit, for he knew that they had power over him as he had power over their destiny. It was this mutual reaction that so drew William to his fields. As he raised his axe again, he thought of the way in which his life had been intermingled with theirs. They had

brought him sorrow; they had reacted not only upon his own life, but upon Angeline's as well, and upon Sarah's. To the end that his fields might broaden and lie clear and smooth, not he nor Angeline nor Sarah had spared strength of body, and he alone had been able to meet their demands without giving too great a part of his strength. Perhaps in his closer intimacy with them there was a mutual give and take between them and himself. It was perhaps because he knew instinctively that he was drawing life from them that they brought him joy as well as sorrow, a joy that hid itself away in the depths of his being and would remain always a little incomprehensible. For, whether or not William was conscious of it, some part of that deep content that stood for joy in him was his subconscious recognition of the fact that he was answering the demand of the Force behind life; that, while man might have no profit of his day's labour and while one generation passes away and another comes, the earth and the sun and the wind abide forever and must be served though to what end remain hidden to man.

And so William, whose patient and resigned

nature had stood him in good stead before, saw at last that, though on the surface his own individual life might seem altogether extinguished, there might be faint glimmerings beneath which would give his life a little of its old warmth. For it had not occurred to William to do other than keep the letter of his promise to Sarah. There was a simple trustfulness in him from which had sprung his utter confidence in Sarah's wisdom and Rhoda's righteousness, and now, because he had learned his lesson of selflessness from his close contact with his fields, from which intimacy had arisen his vague recognition that, compared with cosmic necessity his own was of infinitesimal importance, he had little difficulty in turning from the personal in the situation facing him and accepting it in quietude.

William had been cutting unseeingly and automatically at the tamarack. His axe rose and fell without its usual crisp note of progress, and finally it dropped to the ground and a moment after, without looking at his work he turned slowly away.

He walked across his new field, crossed others, entered a maple grove and arrived at the

road which ran from farm to farm. William never came to this road without scanning it carefully in both directions. To see someone from another farm was an event in the week's round and now, as from force of habit he stopped in the centre of the road and turned to look behind him, he saw, a few yards away, a figure he knew very well. A man, middle-aged, dressed in dingy homespun that would shortly be ragged, stood well to the side of the road, his head bowed, his cracked leather cap in his hand. William looked at him with an expression of faintly amused but kindly tolerance. "Luke's been taken again," he said to himself and waited in silence until the other at last raised his head. As the man looked at William it was quite plain that he did not at first see him, or at least was not conscious that he did so: his eyes were for a moment or two a little glazed, almost as if covered with a thin film, and they were quite expressionless. But presently they cleared, and recognition dawned in them. In a voice in which there was a hushed and even awe-struck note, he said, as if to himself, "It's William Botts; William."

"Why yes," William returned with a slight smile, "It ain't very strange that it should be me right here by my own place, is it?"

The other was silent a moment and then said gravely, "no, no, it ain't strange that it should be you."

"Come, come," William said briskly and kindly. "Don't be down-hearted. I can see what's bothering you, but don't fret yourself over it. You can't help what's to come, nobody can, and perhaps you might not be right after all."

The man shook his head sorrowfully. "I'm always right, William," he said with a sigh. "I wish I wasn't."

"You'll come to the house with me, of course?" William asked him. "Rhoda Canniff's there with the children and I'm sure she'll be glad to see you."

"Yes, I'll come in with you," the man replied, still speaking very soberly. "I was on my way to York's, but I'll stop and have a visit with you, William." There was a note of sad purpose in his voice but William only smiled at it, though tolerantly. He was, however, a little puzzled,

perhaps curious. He had never known Luke Warner to be so disturbed before by his foreknowledge and clairvoyance. They walked on saying nothing for a time and then William spoke. "I won't ask you, Luke, if you just saw a funeral pass by or whose it was. I know you'd rather keep those things to yourself, and I guess it's best that you should."

"Yes," Luke replied, speaking heavily, "I've never yet spoke the name of anybody whose funeral has passed me in the road like just now and I never intend to unless the Lord gives me a sign to that effect."

"And I doubt He will," William said, speaking as gravely as Luke had done, "The Lord seems to prefer to keep His intentions hidden, and I suppose it's best that way. But you mustn't take it hard when you know what is kept from the rest of us. It won't be long till we'll all know. But you've got my sympathy, Luke. It's hard enough when it comes to lose a neighbour without it being borne in upon you beforehand."

Luke sighed again. "You might well say that, William," he returned sadly. "It weighs

you down to know that somebody you've respected and who's been a good friend to you all your life will soon go. The gift of second sight ain't one to be wished for; but when you've got it you must just keep it."

"Well, I've no doubt it was given you for some good reason," William said, "even if you don't see it now."

Luke shook his head sorrowfully. "If I could see that it's ever done me or anybody else any good, I wouldn't mind so much but the most I've ever been able to do with my foreknowledge has been to fix it so that I'd be around to help with the chores until after the funeral and the family got settled down again."

"And perhaps that's been more of a help and comfort than you realize, Luke," William observed in his sincere way. "Everybody's always glad to see you and I'm sure you've done a good deal towards helping people out in case of sickness and death."

Luke made no reply. His face was still very grave, even sad, as they entered the house.

The kitchen was roomy and cheerful. It was a pioneer's kitchen, the ceiling being merely

joists and flooring of the room above, the walls the half-stripped logs of which the house was built. The great fire-place with its crane like a black iron arm, and the cooking utensils hung beneath the mantle almost filled one end of the room. The furniture was utilitarian, home-made and snow-white. The white boards of the floor showed through the thin dressing of fine sand.

As William and Luke Warner entered, Rhoda rose from bending over the cradle that stood in the corner near the fire-place. As she turned toward the two men, there still lingered upon her face the expression of exquisite gentleness with which she had bent over the baby. As she saw the men, it changed to her usual austerity. But her manner was kind to William and friendly to Luke as she spoke to each.

"It's good to see you, Luke," she said to their guest, "You and I both keep moving round so much that we're pretty nearly strangers to each other. When I leave a place, it seems, you're just coming."

At a gesture from William, Luke hung up his cap and seated himself on one of the splint-bottomed chairs. "That's true, Rhoda," he

replied. " We don't happen to see each other very often."

"You're tired out," Rhoda observed. "Have you walked far?"

"No," Luke answered, "not far to-day."

William, catching Rhoda's eye, made a significant gesture and Rhoda, comprehending, changed the subject. "The house seems so quiet," she said to William, "the children are all out making garden, even Lottie and Hester."

"Lottie and Hester won't make much garden," William remarked. "But I guess they like to be out with the others and it keeps them from under your feet."

"The children never get in my way," Rhoda replied, a slight shade of annoyance in her voice.

Luke Warner smiled. "I guess you don't know Rhoda as well as I do, William, or you wouldn't talk about the children being in her way," he said. "And to tell the truth, Rhoda," he went on, turning to her, "I have never quite made out how it comes that a woman like you, not a marryin' one, you know, should take to

children the way you do. It don't seem altogether according to nature."

A faint flush spread over Rhoda's face. The reserve of her nature always made it more or less trying to speak of her inner self. She crossed to the cupboard, opened the door, took out a pile of heavy earthen plates and returned to the table before she said, "It seems to me my case is a good deal like yours, Luke. I don't know of any man who's a better hand with horses and cows and pigs than you are, but you don't seem to care to own any yourself."

Luke nodded. "I guess likely we're the way we be because of the way we was made. I couldn't tell you just why I've never been able to bring myself to settle down on a place of my own, but I never have and I don't suppose I ever will now."

"Well, you've never eaten the bread of idleness, Luke," William remarked. "And I don't know that there's any person in the neighbourhood that's done more for other people than you have."

"There's no person who's done half as much," Rhoda said warmly.

"What about yourself?" Luke asked her. "I'd of said that you'd done more for the neighbourhood than any other person."

Rhoda shook her head. "Man's work is more important than woman's," she said briefly.

Luke seemed to be pondering upon what Rhoda had just said. Finally he observed thoughtfully, "That's something I ain't ready to give my opinion on. One way you look at it, man's work is more important than woman's and then another way you look at it, what a man does don't seem to compare at all with what a woman does."

"Yes," William agreed, as if the question interested him somewhat, "It does seem like that. You don't know which way to make up your mind."

"It's a question we don't have to find the answer to," Rhoda said gravely. "All we have to do is our duty as we see it."

Luke and William assented in silence; and presently the children appeared at the door. For a moment they stood in a cluster just within the room, looking shyly at the visitor. Then, having been told by William to say "How do

you do, Mr. Warner?" they repeated it in a chorus and began to scatter. There were seven in all and they represented three families. Of Angeline's and William's family there were three, Willie, aged eight, Margaret seven, and Lottie four. There were two Pearces, children of Sarah's first marriage, Henry, aged eight, and Sally, six. Of the second Botts family there were two, Hester two, and the baby, not yet named, in the cradle.

Willie and Henry, after wandering vaguely among the benches and chairs, presently anchored themselves by the fire-place. They stood there wriggling a little until Rhoda came to tend a dish preparing on the fire. "Is there enough wood in for over-night?" she asked them quietly. "If there isn't, now is the best time to bring it in." The boys looked at the neat pile against the wall, nodded to each other and went out. Rhoda took down some knitting from the mantle, seated herself where she could occasionally stir the contents of a pot on the fire, and then turned and looked about at the rest of the children. She nodded toward Margaret, the oldest of the girls, who was sitting on a bench

against the wall and who now rose and began to set the long, white-topped table. At a gesture from Rhoda, six-year old Sally got up from her stool and came over to her. "Get a stool and sit close by me so you can see how I make the stitch," Rhoda said in her quiet voice. Sally did as she was told at once. The two youngest girls were walking in childish fashion up and down the long bench by the wall. "Is it your doll, Lottie, or yours, Hester, that I hear crying?" Rhoda asked. "If it's crying, it's because it hasn't a warm enough quilt over it; and its little mother must get to work and make it another. Would you like to have your doll sleep with Baby, Hester? I think she could if she was good."

When the boys had finished bringing in and piling up the wood, Rhoda said something to them upon which they went to a chest and, taking a couple of articles from it, went over to Luke, holding out for his inspection a couple of unfinished wooden animals. They had begun to make a Noah's ark, they told their guest. Luke examined the work with interest, advised concerning it, and began to talk with the boys about

wood-carving. When he had exhausted the subject and the boys had retired to put some of his suggestions into practise, he said to Rhoda, "I see you believe in keeping children busy. It seems to work all right with these," and he made a comprehensive gesture with his hands.

"Yes," Rhoda replied, "children need something to occupy their minds as much or more as grown people do. It's only when they don't know what to do with themselves that they're restless and quarrelsome." She spoke usually in a firm, quiet tone which became brisker upon occasion. Luke noticed that there was a warmer, more intimate note in her voice when she spoke to the children; and in speaking to them she attracted and held their attention by the suggestion in her voice and manner that it was an important personal matter between the child and herself of which she was speaking.

"You start them pretty young," Luke observed, looking toward Sally sitting beside Rhoda and at little Lottie who was working on a piece of bright calico.

"The littler they are, the more they like to try to do things," Rhoda replied. "Sally here

has knit a stocking and Lottie has already made a garter. Get them, girls, and show Mr. Warner and your father your work."

The little girls were pleased to show their masterpieces. Sally took hers to Luke while Lottie, shier, showed hers to William. He lifted her to his knee and taking the garter in his hands, expressed his wondering admiration in highly gratifying terms. "Father is proud of his little girl," he said, "or should I say little woman? Perhaps now that you can knit so nice, you should be called a little woman."

Lottie seemed confused by the strangeness and dignity of the possibility of her having already attained to womanhood and, drooping her head in confusion and shyness, whispered that she didn't know what she was. William patted her reassuringly and kept her on his knee until supper was ready.

The children had corn-meal porridge sweetened with maple-sugar and flooded with milk for their supper. They enjoyed it and ate heartily. Rhoda commended those who asked for more. "That's right," she said as she ladled out another bowlful for Henry, "You have to

eat plenty of good food like this if you want to grow up to be big strong men."

Luke looked at the boys. "They'll be good-sized men all right enough," he said, "and a mighty good thing too. It takes strength and plenty of it to make yourself a farm out of the woods."

Henry looked so inquiringly at Luke that the latter laughed as he answered the unspoken question. "You want to know if it was because I wasn't big and strong enough to chop down trees that I haven't got a farm of my own, and you've got too much manners to ask me. Well, I've got as good bone and muscle as any man who's got fifty acres cleared, and I wouldn't wonder but I've cleared pretty near as much land as any man around, but when it came to settlin' down and livin' on it,—well, I never could bring myself to do it. I guess I felt as if I couldn't be satisfied to stay in one spot so long. It seems as though I've got to have change and something different to occupy my mind."

Rhoda nodded. She thought she understood now it was with Luke. There was that within him which he did not understand and which

made him not quite at ease with himself. He shrank from being left alone with that mysterious quality which other men did not possess. For that reason she was glad Luke was with them then.

"I heard yesterday when I stopped at Card's that the minister will be at the school-house on Sunday," Luke said after a moment's silence. "I expect Ben will be coming round a-horseback to let people know. He's good about bringin' the word when the minister comes."

Luke was a little surprised that his news was received in silence. Everyone looked forward to the holding of religious services in the school-house. They were not frequent. Glancing at Rhoda, Luke thought she had grown a little pale, and certainly William had given a slight sigh. He thought of the sad shadows he had seen moving slowly along the road and he wondered if either Rhoda or William could have had a similar premonition.

The children went to bed soon after supper. There was a loft above the kitchen where the boys slept and, as Luke knew, accommodation for him too. The girls and Rhoda slept in a

room opening off the kitchen, and William's bed was built into the kitchen wall. Not long after the boys had gone upstairs, Luke remarked that the spring air and his walk that afternoon had made him sleepy and, early as it was, he would go to bed. He had noticed that since he had spoken of the coming of the minister on Sunday, both Rhoda and William had been preoccupied and as if weighed down with a difficult problem. His own spirits being low, Luke felt he had no contribution of cheerfulness to make, and it would be best to leave Rhoda and William alone.

When Luke had gone William went out and Rhoda occupied herself gathering up the loose ends of the day's different duties. Then the baby needed attention. When he was put down again, she threw a shawl over her shoulders and went out as William had done.

The low log house stood on a slight rise of ground in the centre of a clearing. A little way from the house several great maples had been left standing and a little beyond them that unshaken maple beneath which the two graves had been made. The light now was like a still, dim

veil suspended between heaven and earth. Seen through it, rimming the horizon, the forest appeared a softened bulk, dark and mysterious. The fields lay half-revealed and utterly quiet, passive beneath the will of God. So it seemed to Rhoda as she looked at them. She felt a near kinship with them at that moment, for her life, too, lay passive in the hand of God. She walked toward the sad, dark mounds that seemed lonelier in the half-light and stood by them motionless.

There was no rebellious questioning of God's goodness or wisdom within Rhoda. It was rather that she was filled with a bitter humiliation: her destiny was not to be that pure and shining thing she had thought. She was not to make her pilgrimage alone in spirit. For Rhoda could not understand that she could isolate her spirit while her earthly destiny brought her so close to man. It was this starry spiritual isolation which Rhoda felt she could not renounce; it had satisfied so much within her, her sense and desire of glory, which had always been strong in her, and it had satisfied an aesthetic sense as well. She had thought of the

spinster's way of life as more lovely in its chastity and remoteness than the common way of woman. She had thought of the virgin as related in purity and a certain exaltation to the white clouds, the aisles of the forest, the snow, and the calm blue waters of a lake. And all this pure beauty she was to forego.

Re-entering the kitchen, William looked about for Rhoda. She was not there. She had not yet taken the cradle into her room as she always did at night, so William knew she had not yet retired. But it would not be long before she prepared for bed for it was only through long hours of rest that she was able to meet all the demands made upon her strength. William felt he must speak to her to-night and, thinking she was outdoors, stepped outside and looked about. The dark silhouette of Rhoda's tall, straight figure was all but merged into the shadows lodged beneath the maple above the graves. William moved slowly toward her. Though he was not given to fanciful thought it came to him that he was like her fate, tragic and unalterable, approaching her. Unalterable, for it did not occur to William that he should

do other than ask Rhoda to be his wife, and he knew she would consent. The simple pattern of his life had accustomed him to single lines of thought and to such short and direct ways of communication with himself or others as might be answered by a simple yea or nay, and now he saw before himself and Rhoda only two courses: they must either do as Sarah had enjoined them, marry and all become one family, or ignore her dying wishes and let the family fall asunder. He had not looked to find any other way of accomplishing Sarah's purpose than by marrying Rhoda. He had given his word to Sarah that he would ask Rhoda to be his wife, for he had seen how necessary it was to her ease of mind that he should do so. He had no thought now of doing other than keep faith with her.

As William moved slowly toward Rhoda, a sudden surge of wondering gratitude toward her swept over him. He remembered how much she had meant to Angeline and Sarah, how she had supported and comforted them in their times of trial. When their children had been born her presence had seemed to lessen their suffering and it was with the most reverent gratitude he

recalled how she had eased their going at the last. Peace and assurance had flowed from her strong soul into their more timid and questioning spirits and had sent them in a holy quietude out upon their unknown way. It did not seem to William that Rhoda was not altogether of this world.

Rhoda stood quite still as William approached. He spoke as soon as he reached her side. His voice was firm for he had called all the force of his nature to bear upon this moment. "You heard Luke say that the minister was to be at the school-house on Sunday, Rhoda," he said. "It looks to me as if it has been arranged like this for us. I know you think the way I do that we should get married and keep the family together. It was Sarah's wish, as you know, and we both know it would be Angeline's if she knew about it, which very likely she does."

As William spoke of Angeline his voice was not quite so firm. He was silent a moment and then went on, "This will likely be our only chance to get married this spring, and since Luke happened along to look after the children while

we are both gone, it seems to be a good opportunity for us to get married."

William paused again. Rhoda had remained as she was, rigid, almost as if she did not hear him. William felt that she should try to say something to make it a little easier for him, and so to draw an answer from her, he said, "If you have nothing against it, I'll arrange everything for Sunday."

Rhoda said quite quietly, "You'd better arrange whatever is necessary for Sunday."

William made no reply. He felt he should say something, something that might soften the moment, but he could not speak. While they stood in silence the dark shadows beneath the maple moved gently toward them and presently had swathed them about. William began to feel that there was a measure of soothing in that envelopment, as if nature were hiding him from stark reality. He hoped that Rhoda was conscious of it also. But her figure remained rigid and she said nothing. A very great pity swept over William. He must attempt to express it. "I know, Rhoda," he said, "I know well that you would never have married if things hadn't hap-

pened the way they have. I'll do the best a man can, and I want you to know that I'll never forget what you've done for Angeline's sake and Sarah's and the children's."

Rhoda's figure lost a little of its rigidity. She turned toward William and after a moment said, as quietly as she had spoken before, "You are a good man, William, and perhaps no woman should feel anything but contented to be the helpmate of a man who is as ready to do his duty by all about him as you are. But I haven't the same nature as most women — I don't know, William, I don't know—" she was not quite calm now, "I don't know but what I've made a mistake about myself and have thought myself more than I am. If that is so, the Lord is showing me where I've been wrong."

William did not reply at once. Then he said gently, "I have never thought you were like most women. Angeline didn't either, and neither did Sarah. It seems wrong to me that you should be forced into marrying this way when it is against your nature, but there's things we don't know about, Rhoda. I'll do the best I can as I

said, if you will try to bear your lot with the best heart—"

"Yes," Rhoda interrupted him in a less strained voice, "there will have to be cheerfulness and contentment in the home of the children."

"Yes," William agreed. "And the children will mean a great deal to you, Rhoda, a very great deal."

Rhoda turned as if to walk back to the house with William. "Yes," she said, a new note in her voice. "The children."

William also turned in the direction of the house. But Rhoda went with him only a few steps. Murmuring something, she made a gesture to him to go on without her and turned back. William went on to the house. His heart was lighter and he did not find it too difficult, a little later, to fall asleep.

It was some time before Rhoda returned to the house. She felt the need of walking in the woods near by. There was always soothing to be found in its hush and repose. The deep aisles were always profoundly quiet; and the motionless height and depth about her created

the effect of meditation upon things too high for man. She could not to-night find the happy peace she was used to feeling there, but in time she laid hold of a measure of strength and calm, sufficient to enable her to go back to the house as if she were going on with the usual round like a woman who has always been satisfied with the common way of life and has not desired to make of her destiny a solitary and starry pilgrimage on which the body is forgotten and only an ethereal sense accompanies the soul.

III

The children were livelier and more content than at any time since their mother's death. One sensed in them an undercurrent of reassurance. Until this morning they had felt the future to be uncertain. They had known that while Rhoda Canniff stayed, all would be well; indeed, with her there, the children had not been conscious of a very great loss, for they had always been accustomed to look to her for tenderness and care as well as to their mother, and she had been even more solicitous for their comfort since their mother's death. But there had been a question in their minds: When would she go? For always before she had come and gone; she had stayed a few bright days and then the little covered basket which came and went with her would be neatly packed and she would leave them. The older children were bewildered by

the thought of home without either their mother or Rhoda; they saw nothing ahead but blackness and chaos.

But now they were quite reassured: all the security and brightness and order would remain with them, for to-day Rhoda and their father were to be married. None of the children, except perhaps the two oldest boys, had a very clear idea of what being married meant, but it was quite enough to know that hereafter, because of having been married to their father, Rhoda Canniff was not to leave them any more and was to be called Mother instead of Auntie.

The children were delighted with Rhoda when she came out of the bedroom dressed to go with their father. She wore her silvery alpaca dress, which they had seen but once or twice before, for it was kept put carefully away, being worn only upon exceptional occasions. The dress itself would have impressed the children with the importance of the day even if they had not realized that a very special event was to take place. The older children wondered a little as to the nature of the marriage ceremony and thought there must be great virtue in it to make

Rhoda more their mother than she had been but for the fact of her comings and goings; dimly they perceived that an authentic mother must be also a wife.

Since the importance of the event to take place was fully realized, no one wondered that Rhoda was pale and quiet, almost as pale and quiet as she had been on that awful day when their mother had died. Her mind seemed quite taken up with what was before her, for she did not always hear them when they spoke to her. Their father, too, was grave and quiet, but when they spoke to him he made as usual a gentle and intelligible reply. Perhaps the marriage ceremony was not quite so great a matter in a man's eyes as in a woman's.

The facts that Luke Warner was with them and a good dinner was now getting ready contributed not a little to the children's cheerfulness. Luke's reputation as a cook was second only to his fame as a story-teller and, the children helping, he would have dinner on the table when their parents returned, and they were quite sure that he would find time between tasks to tell them at least one story. There was

a good chance that he might choose that breathless one: "Jack's Good Dog, Bandy."

William and Rhoda were to walk to service, for the morning was clear and sweet and the distance not great. The children looked at them in delight as they went out. William's best suit of home-spun always called forth their profound respect and Rhoda's silvery alpaca was a rare treat for their eyes.

It was such a pleasantly exciting moment to the children when dinner was on the table, smelling so good, and their father and mother within sight. Willie, Henry and Margaret stuck to their posts as cook's helpers but the rest ran down the road to meet William and Rhoda.

"The baby didn't cry once, and the dinner's all ready," Lottie called out to them when, outstripping Sally and little Hester, she was within hearing distance.

Rhoda held out her hand to Lottie. "Isn't he a good baby?" she said. Her voice sounded only a little strained and unnatural, so little that Lottie's bright mood was not the least shadowed, but William glanced quickly at her. He

saw that against the pallor of her face its lines showed dark and deep. He saw also that as her eyes rested upon the three little girls her features relaxed somewhat from their tenseness, and a warmer light broke over them. While he was grateful that the children had this sweet power over her, there was a slight stir of bitterness within him. He desired neither power over Rhoda nor love from her, but the kindness that formed so large a part of his nature was outraged that Rhoda should suffer so because she had become his wife.

In contrast to this hour William thought of the young, sweet day when he and Angeline had been married. A soft radiance had enfolded them as, hand in hand, they had walked homeward, thrilling exquisitely to the thought that there their united life should begin.

His second wedding-day had not been like this, either. Sarah had been bright and content, entering her new home with light, brisk steps. William had felt that their life together would not be without happiness.

But William did not foresee such cheerful and restful companionship in the days that were

before him now. Life with Rhoda must be lived on too high a plane for his simple, less exalted nature, while all the time she would long for still higher ways.

William would have been glad to consider, as a possible way out of their problem, a marriage with Rhoda which was an apparent union only, but the simplicity and honesty of his nature could not quite accept such a way of life. Then, too, they would be making a sham of a most holy rite, for those solemn words had made Rhoda and him one flesh, and they must not deny the truth.

When Luke saw Rhoda's pale face and the deepened lines in William's as well, he was glad of the good-smelling dinner he had ready on the table. He held to a philosophy of his own, one which life had taught him and which was slightly hedonistic in that he recognized the important bearing the senses have upon all of life. And, observing those about him, he had seen that of all the fleshly needs and appetites those of the stomach could most safely be satisfied and often with the happiest results. He had found that good food, like wine, quite frequently made glad

the heart of man. And so, because of his homely philosophy, Luke relied upon the good meal he had ready to restore both Rhoda and William almost, if not quite, to their accustomed moods. The children, he saw with gratitude, were already in the best of spirits, and, with a well-filled plate before them, were not likely to be affected by their parent's depression.

Luke knew both Rhoda and William so well that he understood a good deal of what was in the mind of each, and, possessing his share of tact, when they all sat down to dinner, with artifice kind as wise, said, "It doesn't seem to me that I've heard anybody call the baby anything but 'it' or 'him'. Such a good baby as he is deserves a name of his own, I think, and the sooner the better. Have you thought of one for him?"

Both William and Rhoda looked interested at once. William spoke first. "No," he said, "I don't think Sarah had a name in mind, and I know I haven't had. I guess I'd perhaps leave the naming of him to Rhoda. Sarah would have liked that best, I think."

There was already a little colour in Rhoda's

face, and it was in quite her usual voice that she said, looking about at the children, "Now what will we call the baby?"

There was a moment's silence, and then Margaret said in her small voice, "Let's call him Luke after Mr. Warner."

Rhoda looked at Margaret and then at Luke. Margaret was undeniably the dearest to her of the girls though all the children were near to her, but Margaret was Angeline's child and very like her. It was not often that she was the first to speak for she was the shiest of them all. Her suggestion must have sprung involuntarily from an impression made upon her mind that morning. Rhoda understood: Luke had tended the baby as if it had been something more than a voice which he must keep hushed.

"Yes," Rhoda said decisively, "we'll call him Luke."

The dinner, Luke thought, wrought a good work upon them all, and when they were through, he saw that with the cleaning-up there would be sufficient to occupy Rhoda's mind for some time. He had noticed before the salutary effect the daily round often had upon people.

But William, without anything to do about the house, seemed restless and disinclined for conversation or, as Luke suspected, company, and so, when he made an excuse of an errand outside, Luke complained of sudden sleepiness that William might feel free to go alone.

William had changed his clothes and taken his axe with him. In answer to the question in Rhoda's face, he explained that a few days before he had left a tree all but felled and had forgotten about it till that moment. He had best finish bringing it down, he said, even though it was Sunday, for fear he might forget it again and an accident happened. To Rhoda's objection that he ought not to fell the tree alone, he answered a little impatiently that it was not the first tree he had felled himself, and he would rather do it without help. Like Luke, Rhoda understood William's desire to be alone and said no more.

It seemed to William that the woods and his fields were always held in a sacred hush on the appointed day of rest. To-day the gently streaming sunlight sank into the fresh earth like an inpouring of the divine spirit, making holy

ground of the brown soil. The woods, too, shared in the golden consecration. From a little distance the massed tree-tops along the edge of the forest looked like the rim of some far, green island lying in a waveless, shining sea, such a sea as has existence only in the fancy; and the island the tree-tops made was like that which the soul wistfully pictures as the abode of them that see salvation.

The serene glory of the day wrought a good work upon William. Slowly he walked about his fields until he came to the low-lying piece of woodland which he had planned to clear with his own hands. The tree whose trunk he had almost cut through was still standing, though no longer erect. William stood looking at it as if he could not recall just why he had come there: his mind had been washed clean of all unease by the same in-streaming of golden tranquillity that had sanctified the fields and woods. Within him was nothing but a consciousness of quiet glory. Perhaps it was because of this unconsciousness of his surroundings that he put his hand upon one of the leaning branches, lay-

ing upon it just enough extra weight to bring it down upon himself in one swift crash.

The sun shone on, still placid and in no wise dimmed; for beneath the green cloud of the tamarack's foliage William lay profoundly still.

PART II

THE IMMACULATE MOTHER

I

The children were coming home from school. That day they had all been able to go. Luke had felt he could spare the boys, for the seeding was done and the hay not far advanced as yet and there had come a lull in the work. Not that Luke kept the boys home very often even when the work was heaviest; Rhoda thought he should save himself more than he did. And to-day Rhoda's hard and fast rule never to keep one of girls home from school if in any way she could manage without help had held for it was not a baking, washing, or churning day.

Rhoda, her ear alert as she worked in the kitchen, near the open door, felt vaguely uneasy, for she had not yet caught the faintest ring of the children's voices, but Bandy had set out to meet them some little while ago, and Bandy always knew his time. Therefore the children

had left school, but for some reason she could not hear them as soon as she usually did. It was inconceivable that Bandy had made a mistake. He had not been in error in the matter of the time the children would arrive at the half-mile turn in the road, not in all the years he had met them on their way home from school. In the afternoon, as it came near four o'clock, Rhoda seldom failed to look toward the slight rise of ground behind the house where he lay, tense and alert, his body poised for flight the moment the first echo of the children's voices—as yet too faint for Rhoda's ears—should reach him. Then he was off like a shot.

This afternoon he had gone as usual. Rhoda had seen him dash off all joy and excitement to the tip of his out-stretched tail. For Bandy seemed to think that a dog's life was a dog's life only when there were no children around. He found a school-day a long and lifeless time until that moment when the distant ring of sharp young voices came faintly to his ear. Then he felt recalled to life. For, while it was fair fun to chase birds futilely in the fields, and the

woods always had something to offer, still there was no real living until the children came home.

Rhoda and Bandy recognized this common nostalgia in each other, and Rhoda did what she could during the day to keep Bandy's spirits up. "Luke will soon be home now," she would say sympathetically to him, and he would attempt a cheerful wag of the tail. And so, around four o'clock Rhoda always thought of Bandy, and to-day she had seen him go as usual. It was now high time for her to catch the first ring of their clear young voices. She dropped her work and went into the road, where she stood shading her eyes with her hand, peering sharply in the direction from which the children came. In a moment she saw them but still she did not hear their voices. That was strange and disquieting, for always they came laughing or talking, two and three at a time. There was something in their carriage Rhoda did not like. They walked too slowly and dejectedly. Even Bandy was depressed, and did not act at all like himself. He should have been jumping upon and around Luke, barking rapturously. Instead he walked along as slowly as the children, his

head and tail drooping. Rhoda set out to meet them.

They saw her coming and felt as had the sons of Israel returning from Egypt without their brother Benjamin. "There's Mother," Hester whispered unnecessarily. "She must know there's something wrong."

"Of course she does," Henry said a little impatiently. "Can't she see Luke isn't here?"

They were silent for a moment and then Sally said earnestly, "You must tell her, Maggie. Perhaps she won't mind so much if you tell her."

"Nobody'll have to tell her," Willie said soberly. "She knows already."

"She'll feel bad now, all right enough," Sally observed, "but I'll miss my guess if old Munroe won't be feeling a whole lot worse pretty soon."

They agreed that old Munroe would shortly be feeling badly enough.

As soon as Rhoda had come up with the children she asked, a little breathlessly, "Did Mr. Munroe—keep Luke in again?"

The children nodded in silence.

"Did Mr. Munroe put him—in the cellar?" she asked a moment after.

Again they nodded without speaking. Rhoda turned and walked swiftly back toward the house. She went first to the shed in the yard where she took down from the wall a long, stout-looking horse-whip. Then she went into the kitchen and on into the pantry where, from a crock, she took a couple of doughnuts which she put in her pocket. She met the children as they turned in from the road. She paused a moment and said briefly, to Margaret, "Make some pancakes for supper and have it ready early."

They stood for a moment looking at Rhoda's fast departing back and then turned to gaze at each other. Finally Willie spoke, shaking his head solemnly. "Just look at the grip she's got on that horse-whip! Wouldn't I hate to be old Munroe!"

There was a general and expressive murmur indicating that the rest felt as Willie did. But a moment later Margaret seemed to have lost a little of her confidence. "I wonder if she'll be a match for him even with the horse-whip," she said fearfully.

"Don't you ever think she won't be!" Henry returned confidently. "I know Mother when her blood's up and nothing gets it up like when old Munroe abuses one of us."

"You bet!" Lottie agreed. "Old Munroe'll learn to keep his hands offen us or I'm a Dutchman."

"It isn't so much because he whipped Luke," Margaret said as they entered the house. "It's because he put him in the black-hole. She's afraid it'll scare him into fits the way it did Jimmie York when old Munroe put him down there."

"Well anyway, I bet he don't do it again to one of us," Sally said with confidence.

"I'll bet so too!" Lottie agreed with emphasis.

"I wisht we could ever have some other kind of a teacher besides an old soldier," Hester sighed. "I'm scared of them all the time."

"They're hard-hearted, cruel old things all right enough," Henry said as he and Willie turned to go for they knew what chores they were to do for Luke, "but I'll bet none of us need be afraid of old Munroe after to-night."

Henry stepped outside, and Willie, about to follow him, turned and, looking gravely about at the girls, said," Don't you kids worry about Mother for she'll be all right but go ahead and get the supper ready as she said."

"Oh you go on!" Sally answered back. "We know what to do and don't call us kids."

The girls were rather more silent than usual as they prepared supper. Margaret scarcely spoke until, her face suddenly brightening, she said, almost cheerfully, "I forgot that old Munroe has only one arm. Mother should be a match for him all right."

"You bet she will be!" Sally assured her. "Old Munroe won't have a show. Oh Maggie!" she broke off, giggling, "Did you hear my rhyme: Old Munroe won't have a show. I mustn't forget to tell the boys," and to keep it in her mind ready to repeat to the boys she began to chant it to the exclusion of further conversation.

Her horse-whip gripped tightly in her hand, Rhoda walked rapidly toward the school-house. Her features had lost all look of having been moulded of pliant flesh; they seemed to have

been sharply cut from stone or marble, against which pallid setting her dark eyes gleamed like black fire.

Despite her great love for her children Rhoda was not a soft and indulgent mother. But now she felt utterly outraged in her deepest maternal instincts. She saw that it was more than probable that one of her children was being irreparably injured, not so much perhaps in body as in mind. Luke, the youngest, whom she thought of yet as her baby, was at that moment suffering fearfully. Luke had always required rather different handling from others. He was imaginative and subject to terrors. Rhoda sometimes thought that Luke Warner's deliciously fearsome stories had had something to do with little Luke's fears. She had often felt like forbidding a certain type of story, but the children loved so much to hear them, and Luke so enjoyed telling them that Rhoda had not altogether forbidden them although she had pointed out the superior charms of the records of the adventures of Tomassy and his rabbit friends, Little Red Riding Hood and, of course, Jack's good dog, Bandy. But as the children grew old-

er there was a demand for new fictional characters and Rhoda doubtfully allowed the introduction of fearsome creatures aprowl in eerie settings. Little Luke always felt and saw, more vividly than did the others, the perilous situation and the menacing Thing about which the stories centred, and in consequence they left a stronger impression upon him. His was the type of imagination that forms the terrible werewolf from the massed and enshrouding dark, and Rhoda knew from his whispered confidences that his imagination had quite frequently created most terrifying things out of shadows of the night. Because she could not bear to think of him as enduring his fears alone, she had encouraged him to tell her about them and then she quietly reasoned them away. She believed that she and little Luke together were living down his susceptibility to terror, for which she was deeply grateful, for Rhoda could not bear to have her child marked in mind any more than in body. But now all that she had accomplished was undone, at least there was great danger that it would be.

As in many places in Ontario, in pioneer

days, the school-masters they had had in that district were old soldiers. Their learning was not usually very great, but, unfitted physically for settling on the land, they had obtained the necessary qualifications for teaching a rural school, the standard not being exacting, and earned their bread by dispensing a very little instruction and a great deal of discipline. Their disciplinary measures were, in principle, naturally like those to which they themselves had been subjected and their own experiences had peculiarly unfitted them for the profession of school-master. And since most of them refused to learn anything from new experience in regard to the training of human beings, their rule was harsh and terrifying.

Abel Munroe was a particularly brutish specimen of soldier-school-master. The hardness of the years of his own life had left their spirit in him. The last drop of the milk of human kindness had long since been extracted from his nature. His was a parched heart. It was not to be expected, therefore, that he should have any feeling even for a child. Indeed, it was almost impossible for a child to touch his

heart for the cruel look upon the weak as their natural prey.

But Abel Munroe was more than an extremely hard-hearted man. To his pitilessness had been added a genuine relish for inflicting pain. He had a peculiar knack of discovering the particular weakness of a child and he was most ingenious at finding that special torture to which it reacted most poignantly. He had indulged his penchant for cruelty until he had become a monster. It was this monster that had discovered little Luke was not always brave and that his imagination could conjure up most fearful things. What was worse, Munroe had found out the sort of thing which most surely caused Luke to lose grip of himself.

The log building that served as school-house had been first a dwelling, which the owner had vacated for a more pretentious residence and which had then been adapted to school purposes. Beneath the floor of the one room into which it had been converted was a small dug-out of a cellar; a trap-door gave entrance to it. Once it had been stored with great mounds of vegetables and apples and with barrels of pork

and pickles, and crocks of butter and preserves. Then the cellar had been a homely and friendly place, but it was that no longer. Now there was nothing in it but rats and mice and spiders and cock-roaches and blackness and, hovering over all, theThing one most feared.

There were others besides Luke who believed that the Thing of frightfulness was there, but to none was it so real as to him. Except, of course, Jimmie York whose complete knowledge of the terrible Thing had drowned all other knowledge in his brain. Unhappily, Mr. Munroe had caught Luke's furtive, fearful glance at the trap-door, and the next time Luke's restlessness gave him an excuse, the school-master took the child by the collar of his jacket, dragged him across the floor, pinioned him between his legs while with his one hand he raised the trap-door and then threw Luke, half-fainting, into the blackness, after which he put the door back into place and stood on it the more effectually to impress Luke that he was sealed up with the terrible Thing.

Luke's first experience with the blackness and all that it might contain was not quite so

unendurable as he had pictured it, for he had fainted away and after returning to consciousness had not had time to realize altogether clearly just where he was when he was liberated, his silence having somewhat disturbed Munroe. It occurred to the school-master that it might be a little awkward if the child were to die of fright and so he had sent Willie down after Luke sooner than he would had there been sounds of exquisite torment coming from the cellar.

Rhoda had not heard of this incident at the time for she had carefully taught the children that they must not carry tales home from school, and so it was not until Jimmie York had been frightened altogether out of his senses by being put in the cellar, that she had heard of it, and then she hoped Mr. Munroe had had his lesson. But unfortunately not all the parents in the district attributed Jimmie's state of mind to his fright while in the cellar; and some thought it was a good thing to cure children of cowardice at any price. Perhaps it did not strike them that absence of intelligence was considerably more to be regretted than the presence of fear. But there might have been a closer investigation into the

whole matter of discipline had not Jimmie been a child of unfortunate parentage and nobody's business in particular. It was presumed that he was now cured of his cowardice and had never been of average intelligence.

Contrary to Rhoda's hope that Mr. Munroe had profited from poor Jimmie's tragedy to the extent of a little wisdom, if not some humanity, he continued to employ his own methods of discipline. For the people who, in his opinion, counted—for the most part loud-talking, hard-fisted, bullying men—were all for discipline in the severest form. When she found that the ruin he had wrought in Jimmie had made the schoolmaster neither wiser nor remorseful, Rhoda, though she was not hopeful of the outcome, had gone to Munroe and laid Luke's case before him, but she had better have stayed at home. She was not one of those who counted, Munroe thought, being a woman with a raft of children about her and no man on the place except Luke Warner who hadn't been any better than a tramp, Munroe understood, until he had come to live with her. And so Munroe had paid no attention to Rhoda's plea that Luke should be

well whipped when he broke the rules of the school-room, instead of being put in the cellar. And when, upon reporting to the lusty patrons of courage that Rhoda had been asking for special consideration for her youngest, he had been heartily congratulated upon his firm stand against interference by the women of the district with his manly methods of discipline, Munroe was more than ever determined to do as he was moved in the matter of punishing his pupils.

Munroe was frequently moved in this regard by a demon. It had dwelt with him many years. Originally it may have entered into him by way of the gaping mouth of a cruel cut in the back where he had been flogged; for his soldiering had been done in the brave old days of thorough-paced brutality; or it might have entered to fill up the vacuum left when he had no longer home or family or close friend. More and more, through the dreary years, his demon had possessed him. At last it had come to give colour and spirit and even warmth to his life as the wholesome ties of home and friendship do for the normal man. It was a demon of cruelty and its ingenuity in devising ways of torment

became an exquisite delight to Munroe. The days were worth looking forward to when there was always the possibility of some sudden inspiration which might be the means of revealing to him still further capacities for suffering of the human mind and body. And this demon of Munroe's came to demand its bouts of cruelty as the drunkard's body cries out for intoxication. They seemed to satisfy a physical need. It produced a pleasant glow in him, a mellowness of spirit, to see and hear some fellow creature in exquisite torment. Often, when one of his pupils was enduring all the pain he could stand, Munroe would take one of the smaller children on his knee and urbanely, even gently, and almost sweetly, delight it with a pretty story or by drawing some fantastic object for its entertainment.

Luke's imagination gave him unusual capacity for suffering, and Munroe had soon discovered this. Luke was slightly more mischievous than the average child, restless, and at times a nervous giggler. It did not, of course, count with Mr. Munroe that Luke was unusually sweet-tempered and affectionate. He

was looking only for that in Luke which would serve his demon: an excuse for subjecting the child to torment. When Luke had received his first unreasonably severe punishment from the school-master, Willie and Henry had interfered and as they were strong and determined boys they together might have put a stop to Munroe's brutal treatment of Luke; but Rhoda, hearing of it, and realizing how easily the fatherless boys might get a reputation for unruliness, and anxious that they should stand well in the eyes of the community, had earnestly advised against further interference with their school-master. She impressed upon Luke the need of extreme caution that he might not give Mr. Munroe an opportunity of punishing him, and when she understood that the school-master was almost sure to create that opportunity in some way, she pictured to Luke the beauty of courage and endurance. She took him into their own friendly and homely cellar, explaining that once the black-hole beneath the school-room had been the same sort of place, and that there was nothing there that could injure or alarm. But Jimmie's case had seemed to prove the presence

of Something of infinite horror in the blackness down there. Rhoda was not able to overcome that persuasion in Luke, and, seeing that, she begged him, if he should be put down there again, to sit quietly in the darkness and wait for her to come. It was a favourite threat of Munroe's that he would sometime leave the prisoner in the cellar over-night and it was the fear of that which worked most strongly upon Luke. And so Rhoda had said over and over, "Remember, I will come for you just as soon as I find you're in the cellar."

As she strode along at her fastest, Rhoda prayed fervently that Luke might be upheld by his confidence in her promise and power to liberate him. She knew very well what she must do. She must accomplish three things; first, get to Luke before he should become possessed of a frenzy of fear; second, show Mr. Munroe that a woman could protect her children as well as a man might; and third, do this secretly so that, for the children's sake, she might not get a reputation as the sort of mother who was almost sure to ruin her family. Rhoda believed she could accomplish her three objects.

Opening the school-house door, Rhoda stepped quickly inside, turning to drop the wooden bar across it before she looked about the room. Then, with a very purposeful step she walked the length of the room toward Munroe. He sat behind a table at the farthest end of the room. Rhoda said nothing as she advanced toward him. Munroe stared in amazement. He did not at first grasp her purpose and then, for a moment, the gleaming of her eyes, the stern pallor of her face, and the resolution of her bearing held him motionless. In that instant Rhoda leaped forward, bringing her whip down upon him with all her force. Then, keeping the table between them, she flashed her rawhide up and down, laying it across any portion of the school-master's body that presented itself. Munroe made frantic efforts to catch the lash, but since he had only one hand it was not difficult for Rhoda to evade his grasp. She used her whip with all the darting swiftness and precision of a practised swordsman, and all her strength went into each cut. Her eye and arm worked in perfect unison while her whole body responded to her purpose. She was there to

give Munroe as good a hiding as a man might have done. Across the firm concentration of her mind wandered surprise at her own ferocity and at her own expertness with a weapon which she had scarcely so much as handled before.

With the table between them, Munroe could not attack Rhoda, he could only try to disarm her by getting hold of the lash, but her rawhide flashed up and down and in and out with such rapidity that the whip slid out of his hand before he had time to close upon it, and another long, red, stinging mark had been left upon his body. Enraged, smarting and bewildered, Munroe scrambled around the corner of the table in order to get inside her range and make a tussle of it. But Rhoda retreated round the opposite corner and her blows continued to fall fast and sure. Munroe still hoped to disarm her, and they began to circle round and round the table.

While Rhoda's whip bruised and stung his flesh, the school-master suffered as much in spirit as in body. To be horsewhipped by a woman was incredible and unendurable. But her blows were real: nothing could be less imaginary. What power was behind this woman?

It was inconceivable that she could master him of herself even though she did have the advantage of a horsewhip. For Munroe had so long been accustomed to being one-armed that he no longer thought of it as a handicap. He was convinced that there was an occult explanation of Rhoda's mastery over him. He felt betrayed. It was as if his own demon had deserted him and entered into her. For surely nothing less than a demon could have transformed a gentle, motherly woman into this raging creature who lusted for his blood. He felt humanly weak before such a demoniacal force. Suddenly he turned and ran for the door. Rhoda pursued and, while he stood wrestling frantically with the bar which, foreseeing such a juncture, she had dropped in place, gave him two or three supremely vicious cuts. Then, the door free, Munroe flung it open and rushed out.

Rhoda's arm fell limply to her side and, drooping, she rested against the wall for a moment, barely long enough to get her breath. Then she darted toward the trap-door. It seemed to her that she wasted precious minutes getting it open, and then, when she had

raised it she was afraid to look down. But in a moment she was reassured. A voice came up to her out of the blackness. Rhoda's heart leaped in gratitude: the voice was clear and natural. "Did you give it to old Munroe, Mother?" Luke asked eagerly. "Did you give it to him? I bet you did."

Luke scrambled out of the cellar. Rhoda's eyes searched his face, and she was so intent upon discovering what his experience had done to him that she did not hear him say, in his voice that hint of the baby — an inflection that had not yet left it. "I was waiting for you all the time. I knew you'd come."

Rhoda had not yet spoken. She was not able to. But her step was quick and firm as they went out into the free air. She drew the doughnuts from her pocket and handed them to Luke, still without speaking. His familiar chuckle, as he received them, was one of the sweetest sounds she had ever heard. They were more than half-way home before she recovered power of speech and then, as they walked along, Luke's hand clasped tightly in hers, she said, "Guess what's for supper."

Luke looked extremely interested. He speculated for a moment, then examined her face. "Not pancakes?" he said hopefully.

Rhoda nodded. Even yet she had no breath to spare.

II

For ten years now Rhoda had perhaps been filled with a little too much pride. Always before, mingled with the persuasion of her high spiritual destiny, there had been more or less fear that she might think more highly of herself than her state warranted, but there was no such fear within her any more. It was so plain that hers was a high calling. She thought sometimes of the song of Jael: Blessed art thou among women in the tent.—She could not but think that she was exalted above other women even as Jael had been. Her sense and desire of glory were being sweetly satisfied.

Rhoda thought of her family as a brood of innocents, like the nurslings in an eagle's nest which is all but exalted to the stars of God. And she did not think that Isaiah's warning against exalting oneself above the stars of God could apply to her. For she had reared her

family in an atmosphere that surely must have been most pleasing to the divine mind. It had been an atmosphere of purity and serene happiness and love. She thought of the love that had filled her home as one of pure gold, such gold as John had seen upon the streets of the New Jerusalem, shining and crystal pure. There was love of her, the mother, of each other, the brothers and sisters, and of Luke, the perfect friend. They were children who found such an influence not foreign to them. That was partly because of their parental inheritance. From Angeline and Sarah, and William and Henry, they had inherited kind and frank natures and that indescribable something that is the rare possession of the true pioneer. For he is one who by nature is a Sower, one who felt an urge within him to make two blades grow where but one grew before, and to make the wilderness blossom like the rose, not so much that he might reap the harvest, but because he was vaguely impelled to do so by that within him which was a blending of spirituality, imagination and a sternly chaste conception of God, all these uniting to form a mild and simple yet

exalted philosophy of life. And so Rhoda's family responded to her sweet discipline and grew clear-eyed and gentle in her house of innocence.

Rhoda's too-great pride grew not only out of her family but out of her own state as well. Was she not a virgin mother? That the children could have been more her own if they had been of her flesh and blood never occurred to her. She was an authentic mother, but her motherhood was immaculate. She thought quite often of William, as one whom God had sacrificed to the end that she might be given the rich gift of motherhood without the sacrifice of her virginity. She thought of William with passionate gratitude, as if he had voluntarily withdrawn himself from life at the right moment. She felt certain that he had been richly rewarded for his sacrifice: there was a softly luminous halo about his memory now and she pledged this sainted image that that sacrifice would not be in vain, that the children he had left to her would be reared as one family in a golden atmosphere of brotherly and sisterly love.

There had been a time when Rhoda had

looked with something like envy upon the soul about to depart and had thought of its glorious, translated state almost with longing. But now she was earth-bound, though she did not know it, for her glory and her treasure were upon earth.

Rhoda was never quite so happy as when all her family were about her, even to Luke Warner. For his presence never struck a jarring note in the harmony of her life. She had always sensed in him a nature as virginal as her own and, what with his extraordinary selflessness and his spirit of devotion, he had been like one of those messengers of heaven who used to come and abide, in times of need, with those whom God loved very dearly.

Because of Rhoda's happiness in the complete family circle, much of the work on the farm and even in the house was shared by all. When her family had been younger, and if it had not been a school-day, they had all gone to the field together to pick stones, plant potatoes, build fences or do whatever was to be done. Perhaps the hidden presence in some cool spot of a bucket or pan deliciously filled helped to brighten the

hours, but however that was, the family group seemed almost proof against ennui and exhaustion, whereas the same labour performed alone and at the same rate of speed was extremely disagreeable and wearying. At first, relatives and neighbours had been inclined to be critical of such a way of bringing up children and running a farm, but as time passed they had ceased to find fault with Rhoda's ways. Indeed, the period of criticism had been very brief. It had never been easy to call Rhoda in question for she had an air of authority despite her gentleness, and so it was not long before people again found that all she did was above reproach, and they thought it remarkable that she should be able to achieve so much. For she had prospered materially: her farm had increased in acres and its crops were almost always good. Her children were straight and strong, good-tempered and industrious, and it was a legend in the neighbourhood that not one of them had ever given her an unloving or disobedient word. Perhaps the respect amounting to awe with which her neighbours came to regard Rhoda,

had contributed not a little toward that growing pride in her.

In the first years of her motherhood it had been the strength of her personality that had established the authenticity of her motherhood in the minds of relatives and friends. At first there had been a tendency among them to regard her rather as a spinster taking care of other women's children and someone would say to her, of one of the children, "This is Sarah's boy, if I remember rightly," or, "This is Angeline's girl, I'd say," but such a remark was never made again by the same person. Rhoda had drawn herself up and looked at the offender with the wrath of an outraged saint, and the authenticity of Rhoda's motherhood had not been questioned again and perhaps became as firmly established in others' minds as in Rhoda's.

Rhoda never recalled the memory of their own parents to the children. She had felt, at first, that it would weaken her own claim to motherhood to do so, and, afterwards, that their right to the children was so slight compared to her own that it was not justice to herself to speak in that house of any other mother but her-

self. God had so unmistakably given her the family for her own that she must not deny the gift. And so, almost in secrecy she tended the graves beneath the great maple in the yard, and she was tranquil in spirit as she did so, as tranquil as the unshaken maple itself.

But Rhoda herself had not forgotten Angeline and Sarah. She thought of them often and, because she had taken their children from them, it was always as the dear companions of her childhood and girlhood that she recalled them, and not as wives and mothers. They were again young and radiant as Rhoda saw them and very happy.

It was a long time now since Rhoda had wondered, not a little fearfully, if her household ever doubted the reality of her motherhood and of the bond that had been established among them. All the children were called Botts though Henry and Sally had no claim to the name. Once, faint memories of long-passed things had stirred in Sally and, puzzled, she had asked Rhoda if she and Margaret were really sisters. None of them had ever again put such a question, for Rhoda's suddenly white and stricken

face and the trembling, outraged tones in which she had replied that they were all her children and all brothers and sisters, had made them feel that to question that statement was to commit an enormity. There had been one other similarly painful incident. She and the children, one Sunday afternoon, had been looking at the coloured, full-page pictures in the large family bible. They had been having such a pleasant time: they looked at the bright, marvellous pictures and she told them the wonderful stories into which they fitted. At length, turning a leaf, they came upon the family register which William and Angeline and Sarah had kept. Someone saw in the one glance permitted, that Henry's and Sally's names were not written among the rest. Rhoda was asked the reason for the omission. She turned the page quickly and evaded the question, but she thought the children looked at her oddly and she was afraid that the incident might have lodged in their minds.

Rhoda doubted if anyone but herself and Luke knew which of the family were full brother and sister, and which but half, and which two

were no blood relation whatever to some of the rest. For the children had all been small when Sarah and William were married and at the time of William's death they had not been old enough to think far beyond the present day, and Rhoda had felt satisfied that they had not concerned themselves about whether or not they were blood brothers and sisters. Rhoda did not think that even relatives could place the different members of her family. Her instinct had been to keep her household pretty much to itself and she had been aided in this by circumstances: the farm seemed more isolated than it once had been; for the village that had grown up in the community was not very near them and so they had somewhat grown away from a social centre. Then, too, her children had all been satisfied to stay at home rather more than other families did.

There was an atmosphere of mutual trust and openness in Rhoda's household, but there was one thing which Rhoda kept secret, under lock and key. It was the Pearce family bible in which Henry's and Sally's births were recorded.

The children did not know of its existence; at least Rhoda was assured they did not.

It was mid-summer and a season of the fullest, richest life that Luke had ever known, it seemed to him. There had been abundant rain in the spring and later had come long, dazzled days of sunshine. Luke gazed at the fields he had cared for during the last ten years as if they had been his own. He thought as he looked at them that they would return a thousandfold that with which they had been entrusted. They had been profitable stewards. As he contemplated his rich stewardship, something plucked at the prophetic chord in Luke's nature. For years now that prescience which had been forced upon his consciousness had been dead within him. It had seemed as if there had been no room in his mind for it any more. The responsibilities he had assumed had occupied him to the exclusion of foreknowledge. But Luke was still a prophet by nature. His prescient spirit, however, now told wider prophecies to him. These had to do with life rather than death. When Luke had offered to stay on with Rhoda and shoulder some of the responsibilities that had fallen upon her, it had

vaguely satisfied his prophetic spirit to do so, for the eye of the seer is upon the future rather than the present, and Luke had had a vision of what would result from his and Rhoda's cares and labours. He had seen, as William had, meadows and grain-fields and orchards where the forest then stood, and, working in those fields, strong, open-faced young men. For Luke had been greatly impressed both with the human material Rhoda had been given to shape, and also with her methods of moulding it. He had read in the boys a clearness of intellect, a frankness of nature, and a quality of spirit that had interested and impressed him, and he had felt that it would be well worth while to give them a helping hand. He had not wanted them to become objects of charity as fatherless boys too often were. He knew from his own experience how necessary to life was dignity; he had not achieved it for himself, he thought, because of that which had set him apart from others and had created a restless spirit in him, but he had felt the lack of it in those moments of timidity that come to all, when what we most desire is to be very like the great majority of our

fellow creatures, being influenced, perhaps, by a subconscious confidence in the safety of numbers.

The dignity Luke desired for the boys apart from that which was inherent in their own self-respect, was derived from the land, one's own fields and meadows and orchards. There was no reason why Rhoda's boys should not have these things. But the boys' futures needed a little working out. There were three of them to consider. Each must have a farm at least the size of the family homestead. That, of course, would go to Willie; they must take up land for Luke, while Henry's father's place must be put in good shape for him.

Henry Pearce's land was not far from the Botts farm by a cut through the woods; but by the road it was rather a long way. Luke had made a road of sorts through the woods and he and the boys had gone back and forth to the Pearce place, cultivating the land and doing something whenever they could toward clearing more fields. For from the first Luke would not hear of the Pearce place being sold or allowed to pass out of their hands. But they had worked

at a disadvantage; a great deal of time had been wasted going back and forth, for Luke's road was little better than a foot-path and the longer way round had often to be taken. Luke foresaw that Henry must go and live, at least for the spring and summer, on his own place. For some time Luke had had it in mind to speak to Rhoda about it, but he had hesitated to do so.

Luke now thoroughly understood Rhoda. And it was because he understood her so well that he was not altogether easy as to what was in store for her. Few mothers were filled with such tenderness for their own children as was she for the family that was not hers as far as ties of blood were concerned. But her children could not always remain with her. Certainly some of them would sooner or later leave home, and then what of her? Luke wondered if she could exist without that constant out-pouring of those full streams of tenderness into which her being seemed to have resolved itself?

But when he thought long upon it, Luke was not altogether convinced that Rhoda's soul had become so completely transmuted into tenderness for her children as was apparent. He had

divined Rhoda's sense and desire of glory. Luke was not sure but that was the source of much of the stream of Rhoda's life. Luke himself was partly under the spell of Rhoda's unique position, that which had convinced her of the utter approbation of God. Luke understood that immaculate motherhood was the crown and glory of all life, that through it humanity had seen salvation. He did not wonder that Rhoda felt herself smiled upon by God.

Luke had often wondered how Rhoda's unique position and self-exaltation would ultimately affect the children. For the latter he had few fears: time was in their favour and would heal them of any suffering they might experience because of changes which were almost sure to come in their relations with their mother and each other. But as for Rhoda, Luke was not easy as to what the future might bring to her. And because of his vague apprehensions Luke delayed from day to day to speak to Rhoda about Henry's leaving to make a home for himself on his own land.

III

Sunlight lay upon the scene like a golden bloom; upon the full flower of the life of the fields and woods this golden bloom was the last, consummating touch. It was like the glow in the eyes and the flush upon the cheek of a bride arrayed to meet her bridegroom: it added to beauty a transparent gilding of ecstasy.

The woods rimmed round the berry-patch; only a few trees rose here and there among the raspberry bushes: it was as if the forest, like an amiable Antaeus, had withdrawn and left the field to his pigmy friends, the berry-bushes.

Although life was at its full tide in the trees, the bushes and the grasses, not a leaf of all the greenery stirred. The pulsation of the life of the fields and woods went on beneath the gilded surface; there, throbbing, expanding and flowering, it went on in secret.

The perfect stillness of the greenery, from

the largest limb of the tallest tree to the tiniest leaf of the shortest weed, was infinitely revealing: there was no merging of branches into mere masses of foliage and no blending of woods and grasses into one wave of yellowed green. The sunlight, like an exquisitively sensitive lens, picked out each leaf and stem among the bushes and grasses, gilding them into a thing of marvel; and in an ecstasy of quiet they held their golden pose.

The berry-pickers were almost as silent and motionless as the greenery. They were becoming languid: now and then one dropped from the ranks and went to stretch his tired limbs in the shade of a tree.

Soon they had all left off work and, grouped beneath the trees growing here and there in the patch, were resting and eating the food they had brought with them.

Rhoda and her family were berry-picking that day like so many of their neighbours. They were gathered together in the shade ready for the lunch Margaret and Sally were taking from the bucket which had been carefully hidden from the heat of the sun among some thick, low-

growing shrubbery. The rest, except Rhoda, were comparing spoil. Luke the younger was aggrieved that his pail showed the least berries. "I don't know why it isn't as full as Hester's," he complained. "I pick and pick but the berries don't seem to come up any higher in the pail."

"You eat too many," said Hester.

"You eat just as many. Look at your face!" Luke retorted.

"How can I look at my own face, silly?" she asked him good-naturedly, lazily lying back upon the shaded grass.

"Perhaps your berries have got mashed down and when they're turned out there'll be just as many as in Hester's pail," Rhoda suggested. She had taken off her sunbonnet and was fanning herself with it.

"Yes, of course that's it," Luke agreed with satisfaction. "I've got as many as Hester but it don't look as though I had for they're all mashed down."

"Oh you baby!" Hester murmured in Luke's direction, winking a friendly eye at him as she did so and then turning to look gratefully up into the green branches above her.

Luke was about to reply a little resentfully when Rhoda observed that they would all need a good rest after they had eaten, before beginning to pick again. "I'm always a little afraid of sunstroke on such a hot day as this," she said.

Willie turned his rather serious countenance toward her. "I don't think you'd better pick any more, Mother," he said with concern.

Rhoda replied that she was feeling a little done out, but would keep pretty well in the shade for the rest of the day.

Willie ran a grave eye over the rest of the group. "You kids see that you keep your hats and sunbonnets on," he warned them.

"Who do you mean by kids?" Henry asked with a grin.

"Not you, nor Maggie," Willie explained gravely, "but all the rest of them."

"Huh!" Lottie snorted, "I'll let you know, Willie Botts, that I'm only one year younger than Maggie."

"Yes, but you haven't got nearly as much sense as Maggie had at your age, and that makes people think of you as a lot younger than her," Willie returned with sober candour.

"Never mind, Lot," Luke chirped, "I'd rather be a kid and not have any sense than be such a wise old man as Willie."

Willie fixed his clear, earnest gaze upon Luke. "You needn't call a person an old man just because he shows a little sense and looks ahead," he argued quietly.

Luke chuckled. "It does get Willie's dander up to call him an old man," he said, rolling over.

"Of course it does," Rhoda observed in the reasonable tones in which she invariably spoke when she joined in the children's arguments. "He isn't an old man but a very young one."

"Well, he acts and talks like an old man, anyway," Luke retorted.

"No," Rhoda maintained firmly, "he doesn't. You think that because Willie has foresight and looks out for the rest of you; but old men don't do that at all. Mostly they have only hindsight and they're more apt to be selfish and think only of themselves, although not all old men are like that."

"Good for you, Mother," Henry exclaimed admiringly. "You know how to argue and the best way to settle young mister Luke too. Do

you understand," turning to Luke, "that Mother has as good as told you that you're the old man and not Willie? Or ain't you got the head to see it?"

"I'd like to know how you make all that out?" Luke demanded.

Henry grinned at him. "Ain't you selfish, and where's your foresight?"

Luke stuck out his tongue at Henry.

"No, I'll take it back," Henry said, still grinning. "You're not an old man, but a baby. Only babies act the way you do."

"Come, come!" Rhoda interrupted briskly, putting on her sunbonnet. "Have we sat here so long that we're all in our second childhood?"

"Now you see, you two," Sally grumbled nodding toward Henry and Luke, "you see what comes of jawing at each other. And the worst of it is the rest of us who were as quiet as anything have to go too."

"Keep in the shade more than you did this morning," Rhoda said, rising, "for the sun will be hotter. If any of you begin to feel too much done out or get dizzy, stop right off and go and lie down where it's cool." She motioned to Luke

and Hester to come with her, for she felt there was some danger of their straying too far if they were alone. They went willingly, for they knew from experience that Rhoda was not as exacting a task-master as were their older brothers and sisters.

It was characteristic of Rhoda that she did not wait to see her directions obeyed, but presumed reasonably prompt obedience. Willie rose at once, took his pail and set out for a spot which he had marked for his afternoon picking. Sally stretched, inquired of no one in particular what in the world they wanted with all the berries that grew anyway, but good-naturedly reached for her pail and slowly got to her feet.

"Lets follow Willie," Lottie suggested. "He always knows where there's the most berries."

"All right," Sally agreed. "It's lots easier picking when they're thick. You coming, Maggie?"

Maggie shook her head. "You go on," she said. "No use so many going to one spot. I'll find a good patch somewhere else."

Lottie and Sally turned to go. Henry had been standing quietly by while the others had

gone or were preparing to go. When he and Maggie were alone, he spoke, "You come with me, Maggie. I know a nice shady spot where the berries are thick and I pick so fast that I can fill both our pails, and all you need do is to sit in the shade and look on."

Maggie smiled. She was accustomed to Henry's looking out for her. "I'm not tired," she returned. "I'd just as lief pick. When we fill our pails we'll both sit down."

"Well, all right then," Henry agreed. "As long as you come with me; but there's no need of you picking if you don't like."

Presently they set out. Henry felt perfectly happy. He loved brightness, such brightness as the sunshine through which they were then walking. And he loved dainty and pretty things. He had always thought Margaret the daintiest and prettiest of girls and it had given him a special feeling of satisfaction to be near her, and when, as now, he did not have to share her company with anyone he was wonderfully happy.

Henry and Maggie made their way through thick-growing bushes, pushing the vinous branches hung with green gilt leaves from their

path. The sun's mood was still that of a painter intent only upon the foreground of his picture. Even in the distance, objects did not lose their forms and melt into a common background. The world seemed made up of an infinite number of trees, leaves, twigs and insects, each of which had its own definite place in the scene and possessed its own particular form and spirit.

Henry looked about him with intense satisfaction; he felt at ease with this clear world of individuals. He could see and place everything; nothing was strange or inexplicable. There was intimacy, utility, and comprehensibility in this world of things, and Henry was glad he belonged in it.

Henry did not always feel so much at ease, so satisfied with his environment as he did today. He had not as highly developed a spiritual sense as some of Rhoda's family, and in consequence he had not been drawn to her quite as the others had. He understood a world of things better than one of spiritual values. Such as filled the present moment he understood best: sunlight that delighted the senses and at the

same time served an obvious purpose, the fruitfulness about him, and Margaret.

But perhaps it was not so much Margaret herself that he understood as the effect her near presence always had upon him. He had never thought about understanding her: he had never felt the need of doing so. It had always been quite enough to know and feel that she was near. But to-day the sun had made her, in common with everything else, so vivid, had limned her so distinctly, that Henry saw as never before, the exquisite detail of her being.

A shy way of carrying the head slightly bent downward was habitual with Margaret and one rarely could look directly at her features. But to-day the sunbonnet about her face, although it was untied and hung loose, was a little too warm and she held her head more nearly erect than usual in order to catch any faint breath of air that might be stirring. Henry's eyes followed the dainty round of her cheeks and chin: they had not lost their childish curve, perhaps they never would. There was that in Margaret which suggested that she would never quite outgrow her girlhood. The virginal depths of Mar-

garet's eyes, like a nun's, were guarded from view by lowered lids; only occasionally these were raised for a moment and she looked shyly up with soft brown eyes. Such a glance she now gave Henry and, while it was not the first time she had looked at him in that rare, shy way, he felt as if it were.

Henry's face shone as brightly as the gilded leaves. He was conscious of a new preciousness and brilliance in life, and when, a moment later, his body brushed hers, it was as if a sweet and fiery essence had been wakened within him. It was something that permeated his entire body but worked most strongly in the brain. He felt a little overcome, a little dazed. He did not wish to speak; speech might dissipate that sweet, strange essence within and cool that delicious fire that wrapped him round.

They arrived at a place where the berries had been untouched and hung thickly upon the bushes. Margaret stopped and looked inquiringly at Henry. He halted, looked about him a little vaguely as if he had forgotten for what purpose they had come there and then said, as if recalled from somewhere else, "Oh yes, I

guess this is the place; but if it isn't, it doesn't matter for the berries are as thick as they can be and as big as thimbles."

They began to pick, Margaret with quick, deft hands which, as he watched them, reminded Henry of little birds, alert and shy, pecking briskly at their food. Henry mechanically stripped the bushes of their fruit. Nothing seemed of importance but to look at and think of Margaret. But presently he came to think of himself as well. For he began to realize that he loved Margaret; not in the brotherly way Rhoda understood, but in quite another way. Brotherly love was not half fire as was this love of his, nor was it unutterable sweetness. His was physical in its reaction: it dazed him, yet at the same time touched into life every nerve in his body and caused him to glow within and without. It was contradictory and inexplicable. It was not brotherly love.

While outwardly Henry had been as acquiescent as the rest of the children in Rhoda's desire to make them all one family of brothers and sisters, inwardly he had reserved judgment upon the matter. It was not that he did not

love Rhoda and was not accustomed to yielding her willing obedience like the others; he was by nature both affectionate and grateful; but there had always been a something within him which had hindered his entire acceptance of the relationship Rhoda so desired to establish. He thought now that it was because he had always been dimly conscious of a feeling for Margaret that was not brotherly.

Henry was altogether too much occupied with his own new and wonderful sensations to give a thought to Rhoda, even to wonder how she would regard this different attitude of his toward Margaret, for there seemed to be in the world nothing but Margaret and his love for her.

He had not at first been thinking so much of Margaret as of his love for her but presently, looking at her, sweetly content to be there at his side, he began to think of her rather more than of his love. Of what was she thinking as they stood there side by side silent in the sun? Or, more important still, what was she feeling? She was always quiet and shy, he knew; not only with himself but with everyone, except, perhaps,

Rhoda. Henry almost began to think of Rhoda at that moment: for a brief instant there had flashed, across the farthest background of his mind, a question as to whether Rhoda would understand these new feelings he had for Margaret, or rather his new understanding of what he had perhaps always felt for her. But Henry could not then spare Rhoda one blissful moment. He and Margaret filled the world just then to the exclusion of all else.

After a little thought, Henry decided that it would not be easy to discover just what Margaret's thoughts were. She was by nature one who hid things away where casual observation would not detect them. Why, he wondered, did she do it? Did she feel so intensely that she could not bear that others should sound her depths? And what was the nature of her feelings? Henry longed to know whether she had experienced anything like that which had thrilled him when his flesh had happened to touch hers. Softly he reached toward her. She would not be able to conceal it from his eyes if, by contact with him, she experienced that same delicious fieriness with which he had been

filled. But as he leaned gently toward Margaret they were both startled by a voice coming, it seemed, from the other side of the bush from which he and Margaret had been picking. It was Sally and she said loudly, "I've been wondering how long it would be before you two dumbies would begin to talk. How you can stand and pick berries for as long as you have without saying a single word, I can't make out. Guess you need to be waked up a little."

Henry did not know whether Margaret replied to Sally's silliness or not; he was conscious of nothing but an overwhelming conviction that the world had been made for Margaret and him alone.

IV

Rhoda was hoeing corn in the garden just back of the house. She worked out of doors rather than in the house, by choice, whenever things arranged themselves so that she could. Usually, the girls preferred housework to gardening and Rhoda was free to work outside. Rhoda had found, as her family grew up, that the labour in the house and on the farm had so increased that they could not now work in a family group as they once had. She regretted the change but she saw that it was unavoidable.

Rhoda enjoyed turning up the moist, brown earth. It reminded her of a shy, brown-faced maiden living modestly to herself and cherishing her hidden life-giving talent until what time it should be required of her. To Rhoda, life-force and that which cherished the seed of life were instinct with the spirit of God. Therefore, to her, women and children had been fashioned

more nearly like the divine pattern than had any other form of life. And in the life-giving, life-cherishing earth she read a symbol of virginity and of motherhood.

Luke was coming across the garden toward Rhoda and she, hearing his step, looked up. The sun fell brightly across her face as she smiled at him. Luke approached more slowly. He did not care to see her bright serenity clouded as he feared it shortly would be. Rhoda stopped hoeing and looked thoughtfully at him. There was tender gratitude in her eyes as they rested, first upon his stooping shoulders, then upon his aging face and then upon his hands gnarled by years of hard work; unselfish work, utterly unselfish work: it had all been for herself and her children. The best years of his life had been given in their service; for, as Rhoda noted again the stoop of Luke's shoulders and the slight wavering in his carriage, she saw plainly that his best years lay behind him. This was not the first time she had marvelled at his spirit of devotion. Often she had wondered at it and had always been inclined toward the conception of Luke as a ministering angel, one directed of God to give

himself to her cause. He had not served her without cost to himself: his worn and aging body told that. Noting this, Rhoda could not but think of the gracious way in which she had been dealt with. She had not spared her strength in the service of her children, but yet, it seemed to her, it was now almost unimpaired, and her spirit was unbroken, her body and soul undeflowered. She had been strangely blest, even to the extent of angelic ministration; for to Rhoda a shining, samite-robed angel, winged and crowned, could not have looked a more authentic heavenly messenger than did Luke with his stooping shoulders, his gnarled hands, and his wrinkled face.

Rhoda smiled again at Luke as he came near. Her smiles were rare and for that reason, and because they wrought such a change in her usually austere features, they were always arresting. Luke almost regretted her bright mood.

"I think you'd better sit down here awhile and keep me company," Rhoda said as he came up to her. "I can see that you're tired out. You work too hard, Luke, altogether too hard, and there's no need for it now with the

boys almost grown men and no more willing workers in the country than they are."

"Oh yes," Luke replied quickly, "They're certainly willing workers. And it's because they're almost grown men, Rhoda, that there's more work facing us." He stopped and Rhoda, made thoughtful by his grave tone, was silent also. Luke looked about the garden and after a moment said, "The corn is good this year. I don't know when I ever saw it so good."

"Yes," Rhoda said, absently looking at the long shining leaves of the corn, "it's very good this year." Luke's words had brought to the fore in her mind that which she knew to be important but which, because she did not want to face it as yet, she had determinedly put from her. She had realized for some time, although she had not admitted to herself that she did so, that before long one at least of the girls must leave home, perhaps to learn the dress-making trade or to attend a grammar school in preparation for teaching. She had not as yet begun to fear that she might lose one of the boys. They stayed with the land, it seemed. But now Luke's words

and manner made her apprehensive. She looked uneasily at him.

"Yes," he said firmly, "it's because the boys are getting able to do a man's work that we've got to make a change."

"A change?" Rhoda repeated faintly.

Luke looked at her squarely, with decision in his face. "Henry has a good place of his own, or it would be a good place if we could put more work on it. Going back and forth between the two places the way we do, we can't do it justice and I don't think it's right to neglect it any longer. Henry is a man now and he should be living on his own place."

"Living on his own place?" Rhoda repeated in a low voice. She seemed unable to do anything but repeat after Luke.

"Yes," Luke went on in his firm tones, "Henry should go and live on his own place. Willie and I have done what we could to give him a good start and all he needs to do, to have as good a farm as any around, is to live there so he can make better use of his time and get the house and land in good shape."

"The house—" Rhoda said absently. She

looked across the fields as if she could see it. She did see it with her mind's eye, as it had been when Henry had just finished it and as it had been when Sarah had made it a home, and she saw it also as it had looked that wintry day when she had gone there to be with Sarah before Henry was born; and lastly, she saw it hushed and sad as it had been when the husband and father lay dead in the room that until that day had been so cheerful.

Rhoda sighed and looked at Luke. He still looked determined. "Yes," he said in answer to her look, "Henry must go and live on his own place. Willie and I will go over and help him put the house in shape. It's in wonderful good repair considering how long it's been empty, but of course Henry Pearce always made a good job of anything he tackled. We'll be able to fix it up so's our Henry needn't be ashamed to take a wife there if he's a mind to."

Rhoda stared at Luke. The thought of marriage always startled her. It was not only that the idea of marriage was foreign to what she felt to be her vocation, but it had been closely

related in her experience with death: she looked reprovingly at Luke. "I don't know what put such a thing into your head, Luke, as that Henry would think of getting married," she said a little severely. "The girls and I can cook and do for him even if he does have to go and live on his own place, and of course he'll come back here on Sundays and likely for the winter too."

Luke was relieved that Rhoda was taking his proposal so sensibly and hastened to say that he'd just been talking moonshine when he said that about Henry's bringing home a wife, and of course the boy would be back and forth almost the same as if he still lived with the family. "Wouldn't you like to go over with us this afternoon and have a look at the old place while the boys and I are working around?"

Rhoda did not reply at once but presently she said she supposed it would be as well if she went over to the Pearce place that afternoon. Luke was very well satisfied.

The log house gazed vacantly at them as Rhoda, Luke, and Henry stood before it. Empty and soulless, its windows stared as blankly at these three as, through the long, silent

years, they had looked out upon the trees and grass, the rain and snow that had met its dulled vision.

Rhoda would have stood there gazing at the house as motionlessly as it gazed back, for its past had cast a spell upon her, but Luke and Henry went briskly to the door and opened it. Slowly Rhoda followed them. They stepped across the threshold, and, the door being left open, the sunlight entered after them. Immediately, it seemed to Henry and Luke, themselves or the bright presence that entered behind them and was straying noiselessly about the room, had had an effect upon the house. It began to take on a faint look of life, as if it were about to waken from a long, long sleep. Feeling this, Luke and Henry could go cheerfully about, examining the fire-place, and inspecting the walls, windows, and ceiling, but Rhoda continued to stand motionless near the door. She was not conscious of the room as it was then but as it had been years before. As she saw it, it was warm and bright with human presence; Sarah was there, wholesome and cheerful, with her air of competence, a home in

herself. Henry Pearce was there, not continuously as Sarah was, but now and then he came in. At his entrance, the room, serene before, took on a lighter, gayer note, for Henry had been of a rather merry disposition like his son Henry. As Rhoda saw the kitchen, there was a cradle in the corner by the fire-place, a cradle empty as yet.

Rhoda was conscious, also, of her own presence in the room, not her present self, but herself as she had been when she had stood there in that kitchen years before, a little bewildered, trembling, more moved and anxious than Sarah herself, although it was because of Sarah that she had been agitated.

As Rhoda stood there, so completely was she reliving that far time, she felt again the strangeness, the sense of separation, which had so troubled her when Angeline and Sarah were first married.—And they shall be one flesh.—It had been her inability to comprehend how the virgin could happily relinquish her immaculate apartness from man that had bewildered Rhoda and had for a time separated between herself and Angeline and Sarah; had separated

between them until they had become mothers. Then she had felt her old confidence in their rightness with God return. For Rhoda had always bowed to the will of God that only the earth and the sun and the wind and the rivers shall abide forever; that, among men, one generation must pass away and another generation come; and, while the facts of its conception remained as foreign to her virginal sense as before, when Rhoda laid a new-born child in its cradle, she looked upon it as the sacred fruit of obedience to divine law. It was another witness to the irresistible strength of the Life Force, which was God.

And so, as she stood looking about the room that was not there rather than at that which was there, Rhoda felt her bewilderment and her agitation pass from her, for she saw herself gently lay a child in the cradle by the fire-place.

So vivid was her vision and her sensation of restored serenity, that she smiled at Henry as he came back into the room. For the child she had laid in the cradle that day had become her own son, and one to make a mother glad. Her eyes followed Henry as he walked about

the room. A fine, upstanding young man with a spirit as clean and firm as his body; just now there was a new eagerness in him which, while it was pleasant to see, for it gave his features an added keenness and illumined his personality, made Rhoda a little sad. His eager interest in his own home, while perhaps only a boyish delight in what was new to him, could not be grateful to a mother's eye. But, while Rhoda was more than saddened by the approaching loss of one of her children, she was able to resign herself to it. She felt a vague disapproval of and amazement at her own spirit of resignation. Had she been altogether open with herself she had known the reason of her submission to this loss. She had been asked to relinquish that one of her family whom she could best spare. Like most mothers, she had seen that there were among her children those who had needed her the most and the least. Henry had been the one who had needed her least. He was like Sarah in that he could adapt himself comfortably to changing situations, and like his father he had a merry spirit that was like a coat of armour.

There had been no need to guard him against stray shafts of ill-tempered wit or of malice, as there had been with others of her children who, without his sense of the lightness and brightness of life—which, like a shining, tenuous, but impenetrable suit of mail, allowed nothing sharp and bitter to touch him—lacking this, the others of her family had had much greater need of her forethought and protection. And so, because Henry had always needed her least, she could now spare him best; but it was not altogether for that reason that she was resigned to his loss. It was rather that, hidden in the depths of her consciousness, there was a feeling, a superstition, that, by surrendering Henry with quiet submission, the Power which could as well have demanded any or all of her children, would be placated and leave her the rest for a longer time than she had hoped.

Very different thoughts and visions had been filling Henry's mind. His interest in the house was not because of what had been, but because of what he hoped would be. Like Rhoda, he saw the room in which they stood a sweet, bright place, made sweet and bright be-

cause of its presiding genius. He saw Margaret moving about the room in her light, deft, half-shy way. She came at times very close to him, so close that, as always now when she was near, he felt breathless as if he had been running, and there was a sweet, dizzying, upward surge of eager blood within him; and then, quickly, shyly, she was gone, but not far, for all the time he was conscious of her presence in the room. Indeed, so vividly did Henry see Margaret as the permanent and presiding genius of his home, he could scarcely bear to close the door when they left, for he would have had the bright presence of the sunlight keep her company until his return.

V

It was a pleasant walk through the woods from the Botts farm to the Pearce place. The light there was a soft blend of amber and emerald; the ground was a tapestry of moss, ferns, layers of fallen, withered leaves and occasional groups of frail-looking flowers whose delicacy suggested that they belonged rather more to heaven than to earth. Above, the branches of the trees met and formed a cool, green and airy roof through which the blue summer sky showed here and there like glimpses of far, placid waters.

Henry was now living, for the greater part of the week, on his own place. Every day or two someone from the Botts farm took him provisions, if he did not come after them. Usually, Rhoda anticipated his needs by sending one of the girls to his house with a well-filled basket, or, which had proved better, had one of his

sisters go over for a half-day or so and put the house in order and cook Henry a supply of food in his own kitchen.

To-day it was Margaret who was going over to Henry's. She walked slowly through the woods for she always found it pleasant there. The soft quiet, the elusive fragrance, the dimmed light and the effect of sanctity mystically lodging there, all made their claim upon her senses and sensibilities. She had taken off her sun-bonnet and leisurely followed the path which the frequent comings and goings between the Botts farm and Henry's place had trodden into the soft strata of fallen leaves. Though she was seldom other than content with life as it came to her, to-day she was particularly happy, in the quiet, inner way in which she felt happiness. She was not conscious of any particular reason for her joyous content with things as they were just then. She was not given to looking within herself to find the main-springs of this or that mood. She accepted herself as she accepted God and all that he sent into her life.

As Margaret came to the edge of the woods

and looked through the green and amber light into the brilliancy of the open fields, she felt a little dazzled by the sudden shining of all beyond the shuttered chambers of the wood, and when she saw a figure moving toward her in the keen white light, she at first did not quite recognize Henry. He seemed a part of the clear brilliance, a little transfigured.

As he came nearer, Henry's face did not lose its luminousness. That came from within rather than from the golden air and when he stood in the shade at the edge of the wood, he still glowed. He had not seen Margaret for several days, and his happiness at seeing her now was like the massing within him of all the shining of the sky.

"I just thought it would be you to-day," he said, a little breathlessly, as he took her basket. "I've been waiting around here in hopes you'd come."

"Oh, you've been lonesome, Henry!" Margaret exclaimed in quick sympathy. "You musn't stay here alone any longer."

"Oh no, it isn't that at all!" he returned

quickly. "It's only that I haven't seen you for such a long time."

Margaret did not reply. She felt a little puzzled, with herself and with Henry. She had always fully realized that she loved Henry and that he loved her, as they all loved each other in their home, but to-day she had sensed something new in the quality of his love, and she felt a little overwhelmed by a depth and sweetness she had not recognized before.

Henry drew her arm within his, holding it close to him as if it were a very precious thing. Margaret felt a little bewildered. Never before had she found it so sweet, so exciting to love or be loved as now, and never before, she was certain, had Henry glowed as now with such an exquisite flame of feeling. For nothing was clearer than that Henry's mood was one of emotion, a trembling, luminous emotion.

As Henry pressed her arm closely and gently to him he looked into Margaret's face. She felt an exquisite stirring within her. It must have been, she thought, that it was because she had been coming to see Henry that she had felt so happy walking through the woods. She must

have missed him far more than she had understood.

They walked in silence for a few moments, a very sweet silence, for Henry kept turning toward Margaret and smiling at her and she smiled back. Their smiles seemed part of the sunshine and part of the morning happiness of the fields and the trees and the birds.

"How lovely it is today!" Margaret said presently, speaking softly, she scarcely knew why, unless it was that suddenly a sense of the sanctity of such beauty as surrounded them had entered into her.

"Yes, isn't it lovely!" Henry returned, speaking with the same soft hush.

Margaret was thinking again of how she and Henry must have missed each other. She recalled now that they had always unconsciously, it seemed, sought each other's company in preference to that of any other member of the family; it had been like that, she saw now, from their earliest childhood. Perhaps in all families there were such affinities; love wasn't quite equally distributed among its members.

Henry stopped as they neared his door. What had been the yard was thickly grown up to tall grass, wild flowers, and weeds. He indicated the green waste as he said, "I'm going to take the scythe now and cut all this down nice. And wouldn't it be pretty to have some flowers growing around, some hollyhocks and nasturtiums and asters like those Mother plants in the yard, and perhaps a rose-bush or two?"

Margaret looked at Henry in some surprise. She was silent a moment before replying. "I didn't think you'd get so taken up with your place," she said, and there was a different note in her voice, a faint hint almost of disapproval, "but it would be nice to have the yard mown off and planted with flowers. I never thought about it before," she added, looking around at the shining green of the great maples and the wild plum trees that stood about the house. "I never thought about it before, but it is a pretty place."

"Yes, isn't it?" Henry agreed eagerly. "And see the apple orchard, almost as many trees as at—the other place."

Margaret looked inquiringly at Henry and

then said, "Oh, you mean home. Yes, I guess you have got as many apple trees as we have, or pretty near as many. I remember we've always got a lot of apples here every fall. I suppose we'll put them in your cellar this year instead of taking them over home. It seems queer that you're not over there with the rest of us, Henry."

Henry looked at Margaret in silence for a moment. Then, as he was about to speak, she said, turning toward the house, "I didn't think you'd take such an interest in your place. But I suppose it's natural when it's all your own and you're living here."

Henry wanted to reply that it had been only when he had envisioned her in the house, had seen it as her home as well as his, that he had begun to take such an interest in it and had thought it so choice a possession. But Henry did not speak what was in his mind, for he feared that Margaret had not as yet come to understand the nature of the love they felt for each other.

The conviction that Margaret loved him was clear and firm in Henry's mind. It seemed to

him that if it were not so, the world could not appear the bright, good place it did. His love for her had always underlain his life, it seemed to him, and had given it its steady serenity; he did not think that destiny was now about to play him false: he felt confident that Margaret loved him.

But Henry realized that a sisterly sense had been so developed and stressed in Margaret since childhood that it might be difficult for her to understand both the nature of her feeling for him and his for her. But Henry was full of confidence in his destiny: that was part of his good inheritance. He believed that to Margaret as to himself would come inevitably the realization of the nature of their love. Through some vague sense in him he was dimly conscious that this realization would come, that it must come, to her out of the everywhere, out of the shining of the air, the gladness of the greenery, the glow and force of life.

Perhaps it was because he foresaw a period of quiet waiting that the mood of his love changed as he looked at Margaret. It became

less a glowing excitement and seemed content to lie sweet and placid in his heart.

They opened the door and went into the kitchen. It was looking much more like a home, Margaret told Henry immediately they entered. She gazed about with new and greater interest. As she looked around, she felt that it was rather more than a room now. It was like a part of Henry. It seemed now to be sharing in Henry's personality. Margaret moved slowly toward the white-topped table and laid her sunbonnet down. She felt herself strangely affected by the thought that something unconnected with herself should so share in Henry's being. She was used to coming first with him.

Presently Henry took his scythe and went out to mow the yard, and Margaret prepared to begin her work. Looking about again, in order to see what most needed doing, she was surprised at the extreme neatness and cleanliness of everything. Henry had not been so neat and so scrupulously clean at home, she remembered. Her eyes lighted upon a bouquet of flowers in a dish on a shelf. Margaret went over to them. They were daisies, wide-eyed and bright-faced.

They were fresh, had been picked that morning, she saw. Margaret turned slowly away and went about her work.

Margaret moved about the room less briskly and lightly than was usual with her. Her spirits had suddenly fallen. She had made a discovery she did not quite like. This house of Henry's meant so much to him, more, it seemed, than anything had ever done before. To think that he would pick flowers for his own house! She was used to his gathering them for her. While the rest of them at home, when they returned from a flower-picking excursion, would lay their bouquets on the table as a general offering or hold them out to Rhoda, Henry had always given his to her. But now, it seemed, he picked them for his own house. Margaret felt a sudden dislike for Henry's house. What was it but a little old log place, and yet Henry was completely wrapped up in it.

When, a little later, his scythe in his hand, Henry stopped by the open door and put his head into the room, he looked about so eagerly and his eyes were so bright with what Margaret thought was pride in his own kitchen, that she

could not refrain from saying coldly, "I don't think we need bother to come over again to clean your house. An old maid wouldn't keep it any cleaner than you do. I see you even pick flowers to put on the shelf."

Henry leaned his scythe against the house and stepped inside. His face had suddenly sobered and he looked a little puzzled. "Why yes," he said slowly, "I picked the flowers and put them on the shelf. I thought they'd look nice there. I thought you'd like them."

"Of course they look nice," Margaret returned, regretting that she had spoken crossly to Henry as soon as she had done so. Always, even when they were very small, she had drawn back at the verge of a quarrel with him. Something, she did not know what it was, had restrained her and made it impossible to quarrel with Henry and now she could not bear to feel cross with him. She resolved not to notice any more how much he was taken up with his house. "Of course they look nice," she repeated, "I was just thinking how all wrapped up you are in your house. I didn't expect to see you think so much of it."

Henry felt he was beginning to understand. He stood quite still for a moment and then, drawing a little nearer to Margaret, said in low, slightly tremulous tones, "It isn't the house I've set my heart on, Maggie; it's having a place where you and I can live together always."

Margaret stared at him almost blankly. Presently she repeated vaguely,—"where you and I can live together—"

"Yes," Henry said, his tone more eager, and coming closer to her, "you and I. I've always thought about it and planned for it. Now there's nothing to hinder—as soon as we're married."

"Married?" she said wonderingly.

Fear that he had spoken too soon or that he had been mistaken in regard to her feeling for him, cut sharply through Henry. He felt suddenly weakened, dependent upon Margaret for a happiness he could not do without. "Maggie" he whispered and there was a tremulous pleading in his voice.

Margaret looked at him with the startled expression of one who has been suddenly wakened. She saw the appeal, the tenderness in his face. In one flash of comprehension she

understood herself and him. Within her she felt the eddy of an emotion that was made up of sweetness and ecstasy.

In a swift, golden surge these new recognitions rushed upon Margaret. Henry saw and understood the trembling wonder in her face. He held out his arms to her. Margaret felt the sweet tide of her love sweep her into them.

VI

At no other time was Rhoda's sense of glory so entirely satisfied as on a Sunday. She awoke to a world filled with the serene glory of profound peace and holiness; she rejoiced in its high calm, and it entered into her. At least it seemed to Rhoda that that crystal sense came from without: she thought it proceeded straight from the golden, gracious throne of God.

Always on Sunday morning the house lay hushed and immaculate about her: not only because she and her daughters were the best of housekeepers but because of their preparations for the day of rest and holiness. Waking to that immaculate quiet, Rhoda began her day of serene glory.

There was an unaccustomed blending of the great and the simple, the holy and the homely on that seventh day. The deep calm that held the

house was broken by the pleasant bustle of preparation for church. Their numbers seemed delightfully to have increased of a Sunday morning. So many articles of clothing to locate, so many shoes to be properly tied, so many pockets to be supplied with handkerchiefs, so many heads to be made sleek and irreproachable, to say nothing of the hymn-books, testaments and bibles to be distributed. Rhoda invariably gave the younger members of her family a copy of the New Testament to take with them to church although Willie frequently explained to her that it was more than probable they would be of no use in following the minister since he seemed to prefer texts taken from the Old Testament. Rhoda always replied that perhaps today the text would be found in the New Testament, and then Luke and Hester and Lottie would be able to find it, but her real reason she did not give: Willie might think it a little frivolous. He inclined toward a rather stricter discipline in the up-bringing of his younger brothers and sisters than did Rhoda. And so she did not explain to him that she always gave Luke and Hester and Lottie their small, illus-

trated copies of the New Testament that they might refresh themselves by looking at the pictures when they were tired listening to the sermon.

They had not always driven to church but of late they did so, for Rhoda had noticed the last year or two that it tired the older Luke to walk to the village. They had, now, a neat spring-waggon which held them all very comfortably. Luke had for some time insisted that Willie be their driver, and Willie, erect and grave, handled the reins with the same dignified precision that characterized all he did.

Rarely did Rhoda approach the little village that had grown up in the district during the last ten years without seeing again the still, deep forest that had once stood there, and very often she sighed gently as she recalled it. She did not know the reason of that vague feeling of sadness that came over her when she recalled the former scene; perhaps it was a subconscious realization of the certainty of change: Rhoda did not wish for any change. The sweet current of her life had been so uniform that it had seemed almost as if the sun had stood still and

her life as well. But she knew that the sun and her life must both move on in their appointed round and she realized it more keenly when she saw the little village lying in its Sabbath calm where the dark hush of the forest had been.

The little white church was an orthodox Puritan in appearance: it was grave and unadorned and its beauty lay in its singleness of purpose. It was Rhoda's custom to wait outside with her family while Willie put the horses in the shed and joined them on the stoop. Then together they entered the little hall that ran the width of the church. There, usually, were neighbours to greet in the subdued tone fitted to the time and place. And then they went in to seat themselves in their own pew.

Their order of seating never varied. Rhoda, coming in first, sat in the farthest corner, against the wall; next her was Luke the younger, next him was Hester, then Lottie, Sally, Margaret, Henry and Willie, and Luke the older. Somehow, from the first they had fallen into the way of seating themselves according to their ages. Willie was no older in years than Henry, but he was so indisputably the head of the family,

next to Rhoda and Luke, that they all thought of him as the older. Henry had never envied Willie this distinction, for it had grown out of a sense of responsibility and a gravity of temperament which seemed to Henry rather weighty to support.

It was when the text was given out that Rhoda was again conscious of a sweeter, intenser glory settling round about her. Today the minister read, slowly and solemnly: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt.'— Rhoda listened to the text and then a still, holy shining wrapped her about. This sense of glorification grew out of her consciousness of the presence of each member of her family, for, though she sat looking attentively at the minister, each one in her pew was as plain before her as though she were gazing at him. First she saw Luke the older, sitting next the aisle, his head, grey now, nodding occasionally, not in emphasis of the points made in the sermon, but because he always fell asleep when he sat quietly for more than a moment or two. Scarcely a Sunday passed when Rhoda did not marvel again at his spirit of devo-

tion, and did not see him afresh, not as the aging, toilworn man, but as the ministrant sent of God to one for whom He was particularly solicitous. Not a little of the glory of the day, the glory that came partly from within and partly from without, was due to this vision of herself as so special an object in the eyes of God.

She saw Willie next. He sat straight and earnest, carefully following every point of the sermon. Much of Rhoda's pride was centred upon him. She knew his upright back symbolized the integrity within. She knew that as he sat there among his neighbours not one of them but held him in respect. Such a son surely brought glory to his mother.

Rhoda's pride in Henry was of a rather different type. Not that she did not believe he possessed sound principles and splendid qualities. But Henry was so fine-looking a young man and had such a pleasant manner! In his different way he stood out from among the other young men of the neighbourhood as strikingly as Willie did.

When Rhoda thought of her three daughters

the glory that fell round about her took on a different quality. It became less a keen, white splendour and more a tender, flush-tinted flood of light gently embracing them all. They so satisfied that virginal sense which she had not lost but which, as the years had passed, had strengthened within her. For God had so unmistakably sealed her virginity away from spoliation that she could not but believe that He held the virgin state as very holy, that it was the state most acceptable to Him. Then too, her daughters were a deep joy to Rhoda's aesthetic sense; for she had always been moved by pure beauty. She felt that the freshness and bloom of maidenhood was like a fragrance in her home; living with it was like living in a world that was always at dawn.

Rhoda's mind might have dwelt longer upon the lovely purity of maidenhood had it not been that toward the middle of the sermon Luke's head had a way of suddenly becoming too heavy for himself to hold upright and it sank against her arm. For Luke had not outgrown his sleeping in church. Willie's disapproval of such babyishness, expressed without fail every

Sunday, had no effect at all upon Luke. His eyes would close and his head droop at about the same time every Sunday even though he knew a lecture from Willie would be forthcoming on the way home. For Willie felt and said that it was little short of a disgrace to the family to have a big boy like Luke go to sleep in church like a baby when he should be following the sermon. Rhoda always hoped to conceal the family disgrace from Willie by shielding Luke's head with her arm and she never understood why she was not successful, for Willie seemed to be completely absorbed in the sermon. There were others in the pew to whom Willie's ability to look in two directions at one and the same time was an insoluble and intriguing problem, for neither Sally nor Lottie nor Hester had ever devised a neat little plan for enlivening the heavy hour of preaching but it had been ruthlessly vetoed by Willie on the way home.

Though she would not have had Willie know it, Rhoda welcomed the moment when Luke's head fell against her arm. For it was when she pillowed it gently in her lap that her enshrouding cloud of glory became an inner

rapture as well. Again she felt as she had when first she held Luke in her arms and knew that he was all her own and that her motherhood was as immaculate as it was sweet. Then the craving for a starry, spiritual uniqueness, which had always been so strong within her, had been satisfied. If, before, she had ever feared that her own estimate of herself was too high, that she might be guilty of self-righteousness, she was now utterly at peace with herself, for God had put his seal upon her. She felt that she could think of herself as patterned, to some slight extent, upon the authentic Immaculate Mother herself.

Rhoda never thought of the state whereunto God had called her without a feeling of amazement at her destiny. She had not lost her vision of life as a starry pilgrimage; but, whereas she had before believed it must be made alone, that the exalted spirit must walk in solitude, she knew now that, with herself, it was not so. Hers was a higher calling than she had dreamed of and it had not involved that isolation which she had thought necessary to the highest spiritual state. She had poured forth the full tide of her

tenderness, which was so great a part of her being, in the fulfilment of her high destiny. Rhoda felt that she had had more than a mortal's share of that glory which, in lessened lustre, falls upon some mortals, radiating from the divine intensity.

Rhoda always enjoyed the few social moments after the close of the service when she mingled with her neighbours and answered inquiries concerning her family. For, though they were all well, there would be questions asked about some of them and Rhoda, like all mothers, enjoyed talking of her children.

The drive back was usually a little more hurried than when they had left home for they were all beginning to feel hungry. Rhoda tried to make the Sunday dinner something well worth looking forward to, and the lateness of the hour combined with the inviting prospect to shorten the drive home.

It was only on Sundays now that Rhoda, looking about her table at meal-time, felt altogether satisfied again. For on Sunday the family circle was quite complete: Henry sat in his accustomed place. The Sunday dinner was

set apart from any other meal by more than its excellence. It was the only entirely leisurely meal in the course of the week. The family seemed then to become conscious of itself as a social group. All sorts of topics of interest were introduced and dealt with to a greater or less extent, and Willie was provided with, and availed himself of, an opportunity for correcting the manners of the younger members of their circle. When, with Willie as monitor, life seemed threatened with the loss of too much ease and lightness, and Rhoda was appealed to, she had a way of looking at their case which made it easier to put up with the family martinet. "Sh!" she would say gently, "You know, Willie's like that." The matter seemed lifted to a higher plane, one where philosophical principles held sway, where conditions were accepted as unalterable, and you were supposed to make the best of them. In short, when Rhoda said that Willie was like that, why, they must just accept him and bear with him, discipline and all. But perhaps when they thought of Willie as he was at other times, and remembered his almost fatherly kindness and thought-

fulness, and his unselfishness, they felt that it would not be too difficult to bear with his tendency to become the martinet.

After the dinner work was done, all the family invariably went into the parlour. Rhoda would turn to Luke the older and nod toward the sofa and he, after a word of protest, would lie down on the cool horsehair to take his Sunday nap. While Rhoda seated herself in the large rocker that was called her chair, the rest grouped themselves about the organ. They had had the instrument only a year or two and were still very proud of it. Margaret played by ear anything she had once heard and, as she had had a few lessons as well, her repertoire was not too limited.

Luke was always first with his choice of a hymn. It was: 'Little drops of water'. There was so much more that was concrete in it than in the ordinary hymn; he understood so much more about drops of water, grains of sand, the beauteous land and even the mighty ocean than he did about the abstractions of which they usually sang. Rhoda would then suggest that Willie choose the next and then they would

sing: 'All hail the power of Jesus' name,' for Willie enjoyed the firm, triumphant tone the words and music sustained to the last line and note. Then Margaret would play Rhoda's favourites, two of them, and they would sing, first, 'Around the throne of God in heaven, Shall countless children stand;' and then Rhoda's particular favourite: 'At the cross the mother weeping.' Rhoda enjoyed these hymns for different reasons. She loved to think of her children in the terms of the one hymn, as a holy, happy band, singing 'Glory, Glory, Glory be to God on high'. She loved to think of them as arrayed in flowing robes of spotless white and as dwelling in everlasting light among joys that never fade. But her own hymn, the one they always called hers, filled her with an emotion that was like a solemn ecstasy. With closed eyes she sang, visualizing the holy drama:

> At the cross her station keeping
> Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
> Where He hung, the dying Lord;
> For her soul, of joy bereaved,
> Bowed with anguish, deeply grieved,
> Felt the sharp and piercing sword.

O how sad and sore distressed
Now was she, that Mother blessed
Of the sole-begotten One;
Deep the woe of her affliction,
When she saw the Crucifixion
Of her ever-glorious Son.

Who, on Christ's dear Mother gazing,
Pierced by anguish so amazing,
Born of woman, would not weep?
Who on Christ's dear Mother thinking,
Such a cup of sorrow drinking,
Would not share her sorrow deep?

For his people's sins chastised,
She beheld her Son despised,
Scourged, and crowned with thorns entwined;
Saw Him then from judgment taken,
And in death by all forsaken,
Till His spirit He resigned.

Jesu, may her deep devotion
Stir in me the same emotion,
Fount of love, Redeemer kind,
That my heart fresh ardour gaining
And a purer love attaining,
May with Thee acceptance find.

A picture of great beauty, unutterable sorrow and most holy glory was before Rhoda as she sang. The pure, agonized face of the weeping Mother, the sacrificed Son, and the glory of the benediction of God, composed it. Rhoda knew of nothing more moving and more hallowed. The Mother Blessed was often in Rhoda's thoughts: she was of all mortals the purest and most exalted. There had been times when Rhoda had felt that she herself was a faint reflection of that Immaculate Mother, but today, as she sang, she knew she was not, even faintly, of that pure and perfect pattern. For the Weeping Mother had been the one and only mortal who could have supported the suffering that such exaltation had brought with it. Rhoda was content with her lesser worth and glory when she sang: 'At the Cross her station keeping, Stood the mournful Mother weeping.' But Rhoda feared it might be that all joy and exaltation sooner or later brought weeping with it.

Rhoda seemed suddenly receptive of melancholy and fear. Across her mind flashed the morning's text: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust doth

corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal'. It seemed you could not have both joy on earth and joy in heaven, or treasure on earth and treasure in heaven. The weeping Mother had had to relinquish to heaven her joy and Treasure. Rhoda wondered for a fearful moment if she were now laying up for herself treasures upon earth. She recalled what a neighbour had once said to her: "I wouldn't set my heart so on the children, Mrs Botts. You never can tell what is going to happen to them or how they'll turn out." At the time Rhoda had not allowed the remark to trouble her, and to-day she would not give it attention. She opened her eyes, sat up straight in her chair and said briskly that they must see soon about getting Willie a violin. Willie, like Margaret, had an ear for music.

It was with a slight sadness that Rhoda was conscious of the passing of the moments of her sweet day. But she could not expect while still in the flesh to remain long so rapt, so filled with a sense of glory not of this world. At least it seemed to Rhoda that the glory of which she was conscious came not from this world but

radiated forth from that same Presence whose voice had said: "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." Though she was not altogether conscious of it, more than a little of her sense of glory and rapture derived from a hidden, unexpressed persuasion that, to a lesser extent, she also was one in whom the divine spirit was well pleased.

Partly that she might a little longer retain that sense of an atmosphere not of this world, Rhoda took a solitary walk in the woods on Sunday evening, when the family was accustomed to break up into its individual units and each go his own way for a time.

There was a half-light in the open fields and upon the roads and about the buildings, but in the woods the shadows had rolled themselves into great soft masses which hung from tree to tree like dark barriers placed across the aisles. But the barricades did not impede one who knew and loved the woods at night. At her touch they graciously swung aside admitting her into their soft, dark depths. But Rhoda found those massed shadows not so utterly dark as they appeared from without for they were faintly

lighted from above: in the fragments of purple sky visible between the tree-tops, gay young stars came and went on feet bright as fine brass. In all the woods, except near the entrance, where the lingering half-light of the fields penetrated among the trees, the stars were the only things that were clearly revealed. Their bright and fickle comings and goings, though so remote, were more real than the motionless, near presence of the trees.

Perhaps something of the intimacy of the stars was owing to the remoteness of their setting. The sky grew more and more purple and its dark richness seemed to recede in spirit from the earth beneath. And then the tree-tops, as if to shut out that which brooded so remotely above, merged into one vast, black, slightly-torn roof, and below, the shadows, growing thicker, wrapped themselves about the tree-trunks until there was visible only the faint impression of the tall, straight columns that supported the dark and ragged covering above.

The air in the fields was cool and chaste and dewy, but in the woods the warmth and fragrance of the day still lingered. In the open,

the air wandered vaguely here and there, creating fresh little currents of air, but among the trees the warmth and fragrance of the day weighted the atmosphere and held it motionless. Leaving the fields, one entered into a tranced world.

It was not only on a Sunday evening that Rhoda loved to walk in the woods. When the withdrawal of light took with it all effect of reality, it was restful to enter into that soft, dark nothingness. One could create, to take the place of what had been obliterated, whatever one desired. Rhoda recreated the past.

In the past that walked with Rhoda then, there was only a sweet sadness, a sadness like the gentle melancholy lodged in the distant, broken call of birds, the slow, steady breaking of waves upon a shore, and the intermittent murmuring of leaves. Rhoda's past was free of bitterness because as yet there were no regrets in her life. Those who had been taken from her had been called of God, and Rhoda found no bitterness in such a loss. And, it seemed to her, the divine purpose in those bereavements was so plain that a mortal could

but accept them with utter resignation. Even if she had not gained more than she had lost by these bereavements, Rhoda was assured she would have felt wholly submissive.

Angeline and Sarah walked with Rhoda in the darkness of the woods. They came, exquisitely luminous, as they had been since their starry change. Their past and present were confused and mingled as they walked with her. Their forms were those gracious, lovely embodiments of the spirit which, according to Rhoda's conception of heaven, filled the courts above. But Angeline and Sarah, though their heavenly brightness was upon them, appeared to her in scenes of earth. Rhoda lived over again with them the happy days of their young-womanhood. Never did she relive with them any part of the time of their motherhood. Perhaps that was because of her instinctive refusal to grant them a share in the children she had taken for her own.

It may have been because Rhoda was conscious of her own clouds of glory that it seemed to her at times she all but walked with Angeline and Sarah in their heavenly home. As a young

woman she had felt herself caught up away from the world in a cloud of rapt chastity; she had even felt that her enshrouding purity had separated her, to a certain extent, from Angeline and Sarah. But now they were all united in the beauty and joy of utter holiness: her sense of her own immaculacy allowed her to feel that such close companionship was possible.

Since she had felt herself in touch with Angeline and Sarah in their celestial state, Rhoda's idea of heaven and of the state of the soul after death had greatly changed. Before, she had pictured heaven as a place of holy stateliness filled with a crystal splendour. There had been nothing intimate, nothing easily approachable there, for she had not desired earthly familiarity and warmth in her heaven. She had thought of the translated soul as existing in a starry isolation except, perhaps, at an ineffable moment when God Himself drew near. And then she had not pictured anything like intimate communion between Him and the redeemed soul. She had thought of the divine presence as moving in a crystal hush, and the great mo-

ments of heaven came when the soul was drawn into that silence which was the glory of God.

But now Rhoda thought of heaven quite differently. Angeline and Sarah came to her, luminous with tenderness and sweetness, not with a holy apartness from herself and things earthly. And since heaven was their home it must be a place of sweet intimacies rather than one held in a holy hush before the might of that glory before which even angels prostrate fall. Perhaps it was that Rhoda's years of motherhood with their sweetness and tenderness had created a need in her of a heaven no less warm and sweet and tender than her earthly environment.

It had been a day of great sweetness for others besides Rhoda. Henry and Margaret looked forward to Sunday now for they had found there was much joy to be experienced merely in sitting quietly side by side, as they did on the drive to and from church and during the service. Then, too, it had created a sort of golden atmosphere about them to feel all day long the near presence of each other; and they had been conscious of a magic in this nearness

transmuting the homeliness of their surroundings into rarity and grace.

But though the day had been sweet, they both felt that a still sweeter time was before them, for Margaret would walk part of the way back with Henry, through the woods. Like all true love, theirs had found its place in the universe, a place that seemed to have been waiting it all along. And they had discovered a marvellous affinity between the universe and themselves: they knew that the coming night would be one for lovers; that a night of stars was a night of love, that in some mysterious way those golden, erratic comings and goings in the brooding purple above intensified their love; that shadows lay soft and secret upon the world that lovers might have a sweet isolation: while an orchestration of the faint evening voices of leaves, breezes, birds and insects would provide a privacy of gentle sound for the confidences of love.

At times Margaret and Henry were conscious of this harmony and again nothing existed for them but their own love. It was at such a moment as they stood clasped in each

others' arms that Rhoda, coming from the deeper darkness of the depths of the woods, saw them quite plainly and heard Henry telling Margaret over and over again how he loved her.

Henry and Margaret had said good-night and had each gone home long before Rhoda had been able to move from the spot where she had stood and learned the nature of the love that two of her children felt for each other.

VII

For some time now Margaret and Henry had been meeting at twilight in the wood. There was nothing furtive in their meetings. At that time each was free and Margaret would leave the house quietly, not saying where she was going, for she felt that theirs was a private rather than a secret matter. Also, she was still too much occupied with the wonder of her love to talk of it to anyone but Henry.

It was not difficult for Margaret to get away unquestioned, for Rhoda had always allowed each member of her household opportunities for solitude. She had found it good for the soul to be quite alone now and then, and she would have no good thing withheld from her children. She hoped that they too had felt the need of solitude.

Of late Margaret had scarcely thought of anyone or anything but Henry and her new feeling for him. Something of the shining of the day upon which she had made her golden discovery still clung about Henry, when she saw him in the flesh and when he was present only in her imagination. He looked so bright and so loving that she could not let his image leave her. And as for the wonder of her new emotion, it filled her to overflowing so that she was not conscious always of what went on around her, for her consciousness was already filled to capacity.

Once or twice a thought had obtruded itself, a troubling thought: it had flashed across her mind that this new love of hers for Henry was not at all like that which Rhoda had so desired they should all feel for each other. The love that Rhoda had sought to create in them had been compounded of certain definite qualities: kindness, forbearance, unselfishness, and loyalty. That which she felt for Henry could not be analyzed. Neither could it be described or explained to one who had not experienced it. Not that Margaret wished to talk of it to anyone except Henry, but she had recognized how

difficult it would be to tell anyone just why and how she loved him.

Henry was taking the place within Margaret which Rhoda had filled before. Her feeling for her brothers and sisters had been a strong undercurrent in her life, but Rhoda had all but been the full tide of her existence. There had been between them not a little of that same affinity which had been so dear a bond between Rhoda and Angeline. But, stronger than that, was a fathomless mother-love on Rhoda's part and a sweet trust and need on Margaret's. Margaret had sensed this special tenderness in Rhoda and, perhaps because of an inherited something in her, had valued it and been grateful for it; but there was that in Margaret's feeling for Rhoda which was sweeter and stronger than gratitude.

But now, Henry's and her own love so filled Margaret that she was scarcely conscious anymore either of Rhoda's love or even of her presence.

Henry was waiting near the woods and they walked slowly back and forth along the path leading through the trees to his farm. As was

his habit when they met in the evening, he told her of his day's work and of what he planned to do the next day and the next and even beyond that. For the future seemed very wonderful and very sweet to both of them and they loved to talk of it and to hear the other speak of it. The house and farm had grown into Margaret's imagination as a symbol of the bond uniting them. She thought almost tenderly of them.

"The other day Luke mentioned something about me going home for the winter," Henry said, "but, though I didn't say anything to him, I've made up my mind that we'll both spend the winter in our own house, don't you say so too, Maggie?"

It gave Margaret a delicious sensation to hear Henry say that he had made up his mind about anything which concerned them both. It emphasized the union of their lives. But after that first sweet sensation, Margaret felt vaguely troubled. She was convinced that no home but their own could be a perfect setting for their love, but there had flashed before her eyes a vision of their old home when still another had gone from it. Because of her nearness to

Rhoda, Margaret knew a little better than anyone else how she had felt about the loss of one of her family. How would she sustain a double loss? But the vision of their own home, Henry's and hers, was so sweet and compelling that again Margaret thought only of themselves. "Yes," she returned softly, "I'd rather be in our own house this winter."

Henry kissed her again before he said, "We must speak to Mother soon, perhaps to-morrow, and tell her we want to get married this fall and move over to our own place."

Margaret assented dreamily. It was sweet to let Henry mark out a path before them both, while, confident of his love and strength and wisdom, she followed after, followed in that sweet, bright solitude into which she felt she and Henry had been transported. For Margaret felt that a solitude full of the shining of a summer day was the fitting setting for their love and home; she felt the need of no other presence and of nothing else, not even of Rhoda and her love.

All day Rhoda had gone about her work in

a half-daze. All mental activity seemed blocked by the impression made upon her mind the night before. There was nothing in her consciousness but the fact that Henry and Margaret loved each other in a way that was not brotherly and sisterly. The incident was altogether strange to her experience, and its strangeness held her mind dazed, benumbed to everything but a subconscious recognition of the implications of this love of Henry's and Margaret's. Underlying the fact she had learned was the subconscious understanding of the extent to which she had been outraged.

It was well for Rhoda that her mind could not pass beyond the blockade formed by the vision of Henry and Margaret in each other's arms.

Henry found himself troubled and even a-tremble as he approached the house. Like Margaret, he had not as yet spoken to anyone else of his love and he understood now that it was not going to be easy to do so. He shrank from trying to make its nature clear to anyone and he could not bear to make it seem such an

ordinary thing as it would if he said to Rhoda, "Maggie and I would like to get married this fall—." Then, too, although Rhoda had never occupied as great a place in his life as she had in Margaret's, he was not now so oblivious of her as was Margaret. Perhaps that was because he was practical and more impressed with the facts of life than she was. But, whatever the reason for it, Rhoda had been more or less present in his consciousness ever since he had discovered the nature of his feeling for Margaret. He had feared her to some extent, feared her power to maintain the illusion she had built up within herself and others and cherished as the apple of her eye. He believed that he alone of the family had been free of that illusion concerning their relationship to Rhoda and to each other which she had created in them, and he had been ready to labour to disillusion Margaret. When he had found it not to be necessary he had been almost as astonished as delighted. The illusion, in Margaret's mind, had vanished instantly and completely before the recognition of her love. But still Henry was afraid of Rhoda's power over Margaret. Even

he, though Rhoda's influence had never been as strong upon him as upon the others, had felt it a strong and compelling force. He was a little afraid, not only of Rhoda's power over Margaret but over himself as well.

When Luke saw Henry come in that evening and noticed that he was not his usual self but seemed absent-minded and not quite collected, he very soon understood the situation. He was not unprepared to see Henry coming to speak to Rhoda about himself and Margaret. Luke had for some time understood how things were with them both, and he had been anxious about Rhoda when he saw that it would not be long before she too must know. Luke thought it was possible that the worst was over for Rhoda, for he had noticed how preoccupied she had been all day, and now that Henry had come to speak to her privately, Luke felt certain that Rhoda had in some way discovered for herself how it was between Henry and Margaret and it had not affected her so deeply as he had feared; had made her a little sad, even dazed, but that would soon wear off. Luke was quite cheerful as he

manoeuvred things so that Rhoda, Henry and Margaret were left alone in the room.

Rhoda sat motionless before them, her face white and expressionless. Henry felt that he must not allow the tension in the room to become too great and began, saying clearly and precisely, "Mother, Margaret and I have found out that we love each other and we have planned to get married this fall. We hope you will understand the way we feel about it and be glad that we are marrying each other and not a stranger."

Henry's voice had died away weakly for he had realized that he was making no impression whatever upon Rhoda. She seemed to have known what he had to say and already to have experienced reaction to it.

Rhoda made no reply but rose and went to a table from which she took up the bible that always lay there. As she reseated herself before Margaret and Henry, the bible open in her hand, she looked like a judge whose sense of righteousness had been so utterly violated that he was incapable of expression in his own words but must read his judgment from some dread,

incontrovertible authority. She read in a clear, expressionless voice:

"And it came to pass after this, that Absalom, the son of David, had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her.

And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin:

But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother: and Jonadab was a very subtile man.

And he said unto him, Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day? wilt thou not tell me? And Amnon said unto him, I love my sister Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister.

And Jonadab said unto him, Lay thee down on thy bed, and make thyself sick: and when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him, I pray thee, let my sister Tamar come, and give me meat, and dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it at her hand.

So Amnon lay down, and made himself sick: and when the king was come to see him, Amnon said unto the king, I pray thee, let Tamar my

sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat at her hand.

Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, Go now to thy brother Amnon's house, and dress him meat.

So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house; and he was laid down. And she took flour, and kneaded it, and made cakes in his sight, and did bake the cakes.

And she took a pan, and poured them out before him; but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, Have out all men from me: and they went out every man from him. - - - - - - - -

And she answered him, Nay my brother, for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly.

And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. - - - - -

Howbeit, he would not hearken unto her voice. - - -

Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her: and Amnon said unto her, Arise, and be gone.

And she said unto him, There is no cause: This evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me. But he would not hearken unto her.

Then he called his servant that ministered unto him, and said, Put now this woman from me, and bolt the door after her.

And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying."

The atmosphere of the room was charged with a sense of outrage. Each word that Rhoda had uttered had violated her own virginal shame of the appetites of the flesh: because it had been deliberate, her self-violation had been no less an outrage. And there was that first and deepest outrage done her, when she had been stripped of her soul's chief glory.

Margaret had not been able to hold up her head while Rhoda read of the shame of Tamar: she quivered in every fibre of her body with shame that the most delicate and intimate experience of the body should be exposed so starkly and so cruelly before them all.

Henry was utterly outraged and angry; that his sweet, pure love for Margaret should be confounded with the lust of incest choked him into silence until the injustice done him burst forth.

"You're crazy!" he shouted at Rhoda, "Crazy! Or else you think we are fools. You know that Margaret and I are not brother and sister, not related at all. We know you're not our mother, and if you had any sense you'd know we know it and have known it all along. We've called you Mother to please you, but we know you've got no children of your own, not one, not even Luke. The real mothers of this family are out there," and he pointed in the direction of the graves in the yard.

There was utter silence in the room. Henry stood with his arm raised pointing toward the graves outside, his eyes fixed upon Rhoda in hot accusation and defiance. Margaret drooped in her chair not yet able to raise her eyes from the floor. Rhoda sat motionless, staring back unseeingly into Henry's eyes.

The silence lengthened, expanded, wrapped itself round each of them until they were all swathed with it, and though clear as crystal it

was as unbreakable as iron bands. And then the silence passed beyond them, flowed noiselessly on up to the ceiling, out toward the walls, filling up every cranny in the room. It became charged with an increasing significance until Henry felt it would be intolerable if but the slightest weight of meaning should be added to it. He knew himself powerless to meet it, to lessen the tension of those bands of silence wrapped so firmly about him. He could do nothing but gaze at Rhoda; and it filled him with a wondering fear that she should sit there utterly insensate, unconscious even of that silence. For it was stamped upon Rhoda's face that she could feel nothing.

The silence had penetrated Margaret's consciousness slowly; she continued to sit as before with her eyes on the floor, but as it lengthened, it focused her mind upon Rhoda, and fearfully, after a time, she raised her eyes to Rhoda's face. She saw that only ashes and ruin had been left there. Margaret had not the strength of spirit to look again at the devastation she and Henry had wrought. Clutching at his hand, she stumbled with him from the room.

VIII

Summer was withdrawing step by step; and all her extravagant gifts were disappearing with her. First had gone the fulness of the fields which now lay bare and brown except here and there where pumpkins had been left to ripen further, until they looked like fallen autumn suns; and though the potato crop was not all harvested, the dead brown tops of the plants, drooping upon the ground, gave no effect of life or richness. The cycle of the fields approached completion. They had given their all, in a rapture of trust and vision had responded to their utmost to the soft promises of spring and the passionate wooing of summer and now lay stripped and deserted waiting for the blessedness of oblivion, the long, dreamless darkness beneath the depths of snow.

And then had gone the lesser riches: the beech, the hickory and the butter-nut trees had

dropped their fatness upon the ground or yielded it at a touch of the hand. The apple orchards, stripped of all their sweet, bright fruitage, lost heart, it seemed, and let their leaves wither and fall, dried and broken, about the feet of the trees.

The wild grape-vines covering the long piles of stones between the fields clung the longest to their fruit which grew sweeter and more richly purple as the days grew bleaker. But at last they had nothing to show for the trust and ecstasy of their spring and summer but a few dried leaves and colourless, wisp-like stems that had no strength anymore to cling to the stones and so were blown about in all directions.

The odour of perfume and spices was quite gone from the air; instead, there was a smell of damp earth, and of dye, as if the colouring of the fallen leaves and petals had run out upon the ground during the first fall rains.

There was now a changed heaven as well. The sky was no longer high and clear and blue: it drooped broodingly nearer to the earth, wan and grey. And the air was hollow and slightly opaque: when birds crossed its upper reaches

their cries returned dully through it and nothing could be distinguished of them but their waving, dark formation.

At first, when summer was no more than gone, there had been a hectic show of a return of life and warmth and colour. The woods and the trees along the fences and on the banks of streams flamed forth in every tint of red and yellow and orange and even purple; the goldenrods were more golden than the sunlight, and on bright days dried grasses and weeds, their yellow stalks and stems and leaves standing out singly against a background of grey sky and brown earth, looked like goldsmiths' masterpieces, more precious despite their fragility than the golden roses given by His Holiness to pious queens. But all that was at best a frail brilliance: the brightest leaves had the least secure hold upon their branches; dawn was later and sunset earlier and the sun was outdone in colour by the pumpkins in the fields. Frost and bleak winds sent the life ebbing back into depths and darkness where only the authentic voice of spring could rouse it.

In due time the desolation was complete:

scarcely a leaf was left, dry and broken, on the branches; there was no colour anywhere, all was wan and livid; and no life, for the bustle and boisterousness of the winds brought no voluntary response from the ground or the branches it whipped about, only the similitude of listless resignation. For the timeless, eternal will to life common to God and man and the earth seemed to have died out of the land and to have been succeeded by a cheerless, sometimes sullen passivity.

For the first time in her life Rhoda was conscious of this sullen spirit in the earth. Always before, she had thought of the barren seasons as a time of quiet and rest in which the land lay gathering new strength to meet with greater vigour and warmer enthusiasm the challenge of the divine will to life flung through the air in the spring. It had been instinctive obedience to the divine impulse to life that had established Rhoda's world as she knew it. It had given life its meaning and its enthusiasm, had consecrated, she dimly felt, the fleshliness of man, for his fleshliness was because of that will to life which he shared with all creation and his Creator.

But now Rhoda felt no strong and silent purpose in the quiet and barrenness of the fields, nothing but sullenness and desolation. And when the rains came her sense of meaningless devastation was intensified. With the sombre, sodden earth below, the low, leaden sky above and the cold, dully glistening, slow lines of rain between, there was no colour or cheerfulness anywhere unless it were in the house, and there even the most cheerful spirit was depressed sooner or later by the monotonous dripping of the rain outside and by the greyness of the window-panes which constantly ran with the dark water.

For Rhoda in particular there was no cheer or comfort in the house. Rather, her sense of gloom and of sullenness were intensified there, for her house, like the world without, had lost its sweetest fruitage. And there, in the midst of her remaining family, she was more keenly conscious than anywhere else of her own case, of her own devastation. Her own case was bitterer far than that of the fields outside: for them would surely come a sweet and joyous new life but with her there was no hope of that. The

sunlight, from which the fields had drawn their ecstasy, would return to them, and again they would swoon in their too-keen sense of beauty and of joy, but as for her, that which had been her ecstasy was gone forever. Her high estate, her authentic and immaculate motherhood were forever gone from her. Instead of the authentic, immaculate mother she had thought herself, she had been merely a spinster taking care of other women's children.

Rhoda had no illusions now. The conviction which had been firm upon her when she had read to Margaret and Henry the story of the unholy love of Amnon had left her. She had not tried to keep it. After the first numbing effect of the shock she had sustained had passed, she had gone to the chest which she had always kept locked and had taken from it the Pearce family bible. With steady fingers, her face expressionless, as it always was now, she had turned the leaves until she found the register Sarah and Henry had kept. As if she were seeking for confirmation of something of which she herself was uncertain, she read, slowly and carefully, all that was written there. There were

the names of the parents and the date of their marriage and below the record of the birth of their two children: Henry Joseph, born—; Sarah Ann, born—. She closed the bible, rose with it in her hands, carefully wrapped it up and sent it to Henry. There was no message with it.

That was the bitterest of all Rhoda's bitter days. She felt that she had renounced before the world her claim to that which had been most precious to her. But she had felt the need of doing it. There had been a satisfaction, almost a pleasure, in stripping herself bare of all her apparent glory. She preferred nakedness to the appearance only of that which she had thought had wrapped her round with holy beauty.

For the first time in all her life Rhoda lived sullenly to herself; she felt her nakedness and her disillusion like a sea of bitterness, separating between her and her children, or them whom she had so long called her children. She neither saw, nor spoke of, Margaret and Henry, and the house was always quiet and cheerless now.

IX

It may have been that, while the empty house had seemed to brood passively on what had been, it was all the while waiting patiently for what was to come. If so, it had received a sweet reward for its years of silent hope. The house was again a home; there, the door was now opened eagerly from without as there was a rush toward it from within; now a watchful, speculative eye was on its floors, its hearth, and its walls that the effect be one of cheeriness and comfort; its windows were clear and shining that the rooms might be bright and wholesome; a careful hand tended the fires that good meals be ready on the table at the accustomed time. The house so long empty, if given to observation and conclusion, must have deduced from this new occupancy the fact, in regard to human beings, that there is much

solicitude in love, and, in regard to itself, that a full life means use by others.

Margaret and Henry had begun housekeeping in the last days of summer when there was still glamour in the sunlight and richness in the fields and orchards. There was glamour and richness in their days, likewise in the seemingly prosaic routine into which their life had quickly fallen. The sun wakened them to a consciousness of the near presence of each other; that was a rare moment. Then, for Margaret, there were so many services to be done immediately for Henry. To lay his plate and cup and saucer on the table was an indescribably sweet activity. To keep the floor white and spotless and the room bright and comfortable were very pleasant duties but not quite so much sweetness was lodged in them as the more intimate and personal service of laying his particular place at the table and preparing for him with meticulous care the things which he best liked and which were best for him. For Margaret's love was wholesome: she kept Henry's best good constantly before her.

In the first dazzled days of marriage Henry

had not lived so much upon earth as in that bright solitude which Margaret also had sensed, where were only themselves and their love. But presently he sought a firmer footing, felt again for contact with the ground, and as before began to see and feel his love for Margaret in the common things about him. Not that these common things were altogether as they had been. Now, when their lives were actually united, it was wonderful the way those things that ministered to their daily needs seemed altered, enhanced in worth and beauty. There was, for instance, the case of their cow. When it had been in the pastures or barn-yard of the Botts farm, Henry had seen her as a red cow in good condition, a rather better-than-average milker, sufficiently intelligent, and amenable enough to discipline. But, immediately she was in his own pasture and barn-yard, he saw that she was a most interesting and almost unique creature. He would no longer have described her as a red cow; her colour seemed now a rich cherry. He saw also that her condition was perfect: she was neither too fat to be a good milker nor too lean to winter well. Her milk

was richer than he had noticed before; the mildness of her eye, it seemed to both Margaret and Henry, bespoke an amiable, if not an affectionate, disposition and cloaked a keener-than-usual intelligence. So entirely different a creature did the cow seem that they were impressed with the need of a new name for her. They decided to call her Blue-bell. It was not an egotistic or acquisitive instinct in Margaret or Henry that created in them the illusion of enhanced parts in their cow, but because, in her humble way, she was now ministering to the needs of their united life.

This extraordinary difference in the worth of things extended almost to everything, and to the activities of the daily round. It was such a different matter now to get a pail of water. On the Botts farm there was a well with a windlass, but at his own place Henry dipped a bucket into the spring at the foot of the slope at the side of the house. He had never before realized how pure and cold was the water in a spring nor how serenely the stones rested on the bottom, like agates in a setting of fluent glass. Neither had he observed how gracious were those waters

to the grasses that drew close to them as if to touch the hem of a life-giving garment, nor had he noticed until now how the great maple close by loved to bury its shadow in the transparent coolness below.

There came also to Henry a new sense of responsibility. To know that he held in his own hands the comfort and well-being of another would have been a sobering thought in itself, but when Henry realized this and knew it was Margaret's welfare for which he was in great measure answerable, he felt the responsibility was no slight thing. Not that he felt weighted down; it was a welcome responsibility, but he began to walk with a rather firmer, stronger step, he carried himself with more assurance and spoke with greater decision.

Summer passed, even to the last strayed day that wandered, bright and silken, into the wanness and dilapidation of autumn. With less and less assurance the sun came up over the tops of the trees along the horizon. Night was no longer startled into hasty leaving, and at last it seemed rather more as if night voluntarily withdrew, giving way of courtesy to a worsted rival, than

that it was ousted by a stronger force. For the sun had lost all its fine frenzy of brilliance; there were days when one could stare at it with the naked eye.

In the first days of autumn, in the morning, one could not regret the lost brilliance and warmth, for because of the chilled air and the lack-lustre sky, upon the fields and trees, and the roofs and fences was a pearl-grey loveliness whose gentle mission seemed to be to hide the wounds and despoliation of the land. But it scarcely accomplished its purpose, having no substance at all, for it was the hoar-frost, and when the sun grew stronger, though at first it seemed to love the brightness, responding to it by turning a pure and dazzling white, suddenly it was nothing but a damp darkness upon the ground. But the brittle frostiness of the air lingered longer than the hoar-frost. It was not unwelcome; there was friendliness in its nip rather like that of a playful dog. It made one walk faster, stamp the feet upon the ground and think gratefully of the fire in the house.

Neither Margaret nor Henry was depressed because of the lost warmth and brilliance.

Rather, they felt a new excitement within as if they sensed a challenge in the biting of the frost and the emptiness around them. Margaret looked to the condition of their warm, winter clothing and Henry stored away great piles of wood, and when he went to the spring, as he carefully scooped up the fallen leaves floating upon its surface, lest they become soaked and fall to the bottom, tainting the water, his mind was busy with the best ways and means of getting water when the hard frosts and the snow came.

In the late autumn, when the frosted air nipped a little more bitingly, there dawned what something in Henry recognized as the authentic nutting day. He knew it by the sounds outside, by the tang in the air, by the tingle in his blood. There was a restlessness and a desire in him which only the ravishing of great butter-nut, hickory-nut and beech-nut trees could drive away or satisfy. Margaret was as accustomed as himself to the autumnal nutting excursions, and one quiet but crisp morning they set out for the woods where was usually most spoil to be had.

The morning early lost its clearness and intimate crispness, growing into one of those still, brooding autumn days when it seems as if the spirit of the season, having wrapped itself in haze, like a nun has hidden itself in holy retreat; there was a remoteness and an apartness in everything: familiar objects were dim as if they too had veiled themselves and hidden away their reality.

As Margaret and Henry walked toward the woods she wondered when the family nutting excursion would take place this year. Before, they had all gone, the older Luke, Rhoda, the children, and Bandy. It had been a day filled with voices and fun; it had been an exhausting day but every moment of it had been gay and good.

Perhaps it was the remoteness of the world about her, or perhaps it was the sudden up-rush of the nostalgia that had been lying in the bottom of Margaret's consciousness that now filled her with sadness and continued to well up in such floods that at length she felt there must have been heart-break within. She burst into tears. Henry turned in utter consternation. He

put his arms about her and, because her tears came fast and many, like a child's, he began to say over and over all the soothing things people say to children when their grief is rather more than momentary. But Margaret would not be comforted. Henry grew more and more perplexed. Though he asked her repeatedly what made her feel so, she made no reply whatever. Finally he tried another question; "Did you feel bad before we left the house, Maggie?" he asked tenderly.

Margaret's tears came more slowly now and she wept more quietly but they indicated a more deeply seated grief than the first violence. When Henry had repeated his question whether she had felt distressed before leaving the house, she at last replied sobbingly, "I—don't know.—Perhaps."

The reply to his question did not give Henry a clearer insight into the cause of Maggie's distress. He stood silent a moment, gently stroking her hair. "I guess it must be that you're not feeling well this morning, Maggie," he suggested presently.

Maggie shook her head as she wiped away

her tears. "No—I was just thinking, that's all."

Maggie's grief seemed to be subsiding somewhat, and Henry judged that she could now give him a clearer idea of what had been troubling her. He asked, "What were you thinking about, Maggie dear?"

Henry was disconcerted to see a fresh burst of tears. But this last flood of grief was like the final shower of a summer storm, profuse but brief. Henry was pleased to see Margaret grow quite composed in an unexpectedly short time. His arm pressed her a little more closely; "Perhaps you're a little homesick, Maggie dear," he whispered, "I've been just a little bit too."

Maggie picked up her sunbonnet which had fallen off when she had been crying. Her face was quite composed when she turned again to Henry and said, almost naturally, "I guess we'd better be going now."

They walked on in silence for a time. Though he was grateful that Margaret was now composed, Henry felt a little hurt that she had not confided to him the real source of her distress. Not that he did not feel quite certain that he understood her, but he resented a little that she

had not talked it over with him. He was not surprised, when he thought of it, that Margaret should have suddenly felt a great longing for her old home and for all in it on that morning. He, too, had recalled the annual family nutting excursion and had missed the voices and gaiety with which the day had been filled. He would have liked to whisper to Margaret, "Wouldn't it be nice if the rest could be here too?" He had not done so because of the dread that had been with him ever since he had realized the nature of his love for Margaret. Henry had not lost his fear of Rhoda's influence over her. He had often wondered that it had not asserted itself before, and had concluded, with a rush of delight, that Margaret's love for him had triumphed over her love for Rhoda. But this morning, for the first time since Margaret had acknowledged her love for him, Henry was a little fearful, and the more he thought the more fearful he grew. He knew it was not nostalgia for her home and brothers and sisters that she felt, for all the family but Rhoda came quite frequently to see them. It was a yearning for the mother that was upon Margaret. Henry was the more certain of it

because of her silence, and it was this silence that hurt him. Love was giving Henry understanding. He saw that Margaret's yearning for Rhoda, like their own love, was one of those things which the whole being shrinks from expressing. Vaguely he felt the reason for this shrinking. The being recognized its inability to do so. It could not segregate this element in itself and describe it. It inhered within, mingled with those things which composed the personality. And so, because Margaret was incapable of speaking of her feeling for Rhoda, Henry knew how much a part of herself it was. He had not forced Rhoda out of her being.

Margaret's artificial cheerfulness spoiled their day more effectually than her tears might have done, but Henry, from the first moment of her giving way, had not had high hopes of their excursion. He was gentle with her for he did not hold her responsible for their lost pleasure; it seemed to him that it was the inevitable that had happened.

In the evening, as they sat before the fire, talking desultorily, but with the idea of Rhoda always in his mind, Henry began to think of his

own relation toward her. A man, he told himself, was of tougher fibre than a girl and naturally not so receptive of tender sentiments, but as he thought of the past, it grew on him more and more that Rhoda had made his childhood wonderfully bright and easy. He thought of the way she had made even the most disagreeable tasks lighter and endurable. Henry remembered the hilly, stony field at the back of their farm. Every spring they had had to pick it clear of stones, and picking stones was the one kind of work he loathed. It cramped every muscle in his body, and it was such a hopeless task. But Rhoda had had a way of keeping a pleasing prospect before them even when they were engaged in picking stones.

As Henry relived the past, an incident which for many years had been very vividly before him suddenly leaped into his memory. He wondered how it could have slipped into obscurity within him, for it had for years been to him like a star that gives reassurance and direction to an uncertain traveller. Henry recalled each detail of the incident with perfect clearness. It had occurred when he was little. One of the Botts

relatives was visiting them and, after looking fixedly at him, had inquired his name. "Henry Botts," he had replied. The Botts relative had shaken his head. "No," he had said decidedly, "You don't belong to the Bottses." Henry remembered distinctly how he had felt at that denial of his right to the name he had been using. He knew vaguely that there was another name by which he might call himself but since Rhoda had always recognized but one name in her family, he had all but forgotten that other one. But now it seemed that he had been using something to which he had no right, and he felt as if an entire tribe of Bottses stood up as one man and put him outside the family pale. He had felt that there was no place in the world where he definitely fitted in, that he was almost homeless. But Henry could also recall, even yet, the firm, warm clasp of Rhoda's hand as she had reached out and taken his, saying with a ring of unimpeachable authority in her voice, "He is my boy and my name is his name." The Botts relative had not dared to deny him again and Henry had felt re-established in the world and in his home.

Thinking of this and other incidents in his childhood, Henry leaned forward in his chair and, resting his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands, looked broodingly at the fire. Margaret, too, was silent and Henry knew that her work had fallen to her lap and she, like himself, watched the red dance of the flames. Presently he became conscious of the steady, though light fall of rain upon the roof. "The fall rains have set in," he said to himself. His mood became a little sombre. He never felt quite so much at home in the world during the season of rain. He loved and understood the brightness and vividness of clear, strong sunlight. There was not as yet within him that spirit of resignation and sense of purpose and reality in obscurity necessary to a feeling of affinity with the long, grey days of rain.

The unvarying drip upon the house had depressed Margaret also and because it had power to do so she was filled with melancholy. She had not thought life with Henry could ever lack brightness and utter content, but now she knew it was possible, and as her sweet illusion drifted forever away from her, and she was

conscious of its going, Margaret's melancholy deepened into sadness. Their love, then, would not, as she had thought, be proof against all untowardness and adversity. Frost, rain, snow, storm, weariness and pain would more or less affect them. In their lives would be grey days, melancholy days, sad days and perhaps even bitter days. There was a finiteness to all human love, it seemed. Rhoda had proved that. No rock, Margaret had thought, was so high and broad and indestructible as Rhoda's love, but it had vanished. A rock. Margaret's brows knit. She was conscious of an association with the word which she needed just then to recall. She would like to feel an unchanging, unmoving rock beneath her feet. A rock. Margaret's eyes strayed about the room. They fell upon the Pearce family bible which Rhoda had sent them. She remembered now. — A wise man which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. — A foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and

the winds blew, and beat upon the house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. —The rock upon which the wise man had founded his house had always been subconsciously a symbol to her of Rhoda's love. It seemed inconceivable now that it had vanished. Perhaps it had not. It might be, Margaret thought, that it still stood, as great as ever and as firm, but for the time a bitter sea separated between it and them.

Henry's eyes had followed Margaret's and they had also rested upon the bible Rhoda had sent him. He had not thought before that there might be any significance in Rhoda's sending the Pearce family bible to him. He wondered now if there could be. It showed, at least, that Rhoda's illusion had broken down. She had recognized Margaret's and his right to love and marry. What, then, stood in the way of reconciliation with her? Henry had never been conscious of a very great love for anyone but Margaret and he was not now conscious of an overwhelming love and need of Rhoda, but as he thought of the possibility of a reconciliation with her the world seemed to change. The dreary fall of rain upon the roof no longer brought a

picture of cheerlessness but he thought of it as of those bright and familiar drops of water of which they had sung on Sundays in those days that seemed now regretfully remote.

PART III

The Guest Of Heaven

"And I, Isaiah, saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up."

One by one the rest had gone to bed until only Luke and Rhoda remained in the kitchen. Of late Luke had made a change in his hour of retiring. It had been usual with him to go to bed very early, not long after sun-down, but he kept later hours now. That was because he did not quite like leaving Rhoda sitting alone. She had taken to staying up after the children and Luke did not care to think of her surrounded with silence, alone with her inner cheerlessness.

Rhoda sat by the table reading her bible and Luke, sitting before the fire, gazed silently into it. He was oppressed with the quiet. He was not accustomed to it. Rhoda's house had always before been a rather noisy one. Luke smiled a little whimsically as he thought that he was like poor old Bandy, or as Bandy had once been: he liked noise. Luke looked over at Rhoda. He had got into the habit lately of

looking quickly and hopefully into her face now and then to see if any of its old serene happiness and content had returned. But it had not. Rhoda's face remained set and pale and remote.

For the first time since he had known her intimately, Luke began to feel a little impatient, a little resentful toward Rhoda. She was changing their life so much that he, for one, had lost much of his zest for it, and certainly this atmosphere of gloom would be a bad thing for the young folks. The first thing they knew Willie would be wanting to spend his evenings in the village or at a neighbour's instead of being contented as he always had been to stay at home and read or play his violin or have a game of checkers or dominoes with one of the girls or with Luke himself. And it would be the same with the girls and little Luke. No one felt at home any more for they had all been so unaccustomed to tension and gloom and apathy that now the house seemed an unfamiliar place. Luke had begun to ask himself if Rhoda had loved her family as he had thought, for it was hard to think that such a love as he had thought hers to be could sacrifice the happiness and well-

being of its objects as she was doing. And all because of a lost illusion. Luke sighed, rose and went to the window. He rarely went to bed, especially in the winter, without looking at the weather. It was because of his sense of responsibility that this had become a fixed habit with him. He had felt that with a houseful of children you never knew which one might be taken with croup or fever in the night and a neighbour be needed, and Luke had wished to know what sort of weather he might expect to face. But to-night, though he looked out as usual, when he turned away from the window he had no clearer idea of the weather than before, for he had seen nothing, although it was not a dark night. All of Luke's senses were dulled to-night as they had been for some time. Life was no more the good thing it had been. As Luke climbed the stairs he sighed because of the inevitability of change. One generation must pass away and another come. It was his generation that was about to pass and a new one was already taking its place. They no longer spoke of the children in the house, but of the young folks. They did not now need

him as they had. The sweetness of those full days of responsibility was gone from his life forever.

After Luke had gone, Rhoda continued to read on. She finished the fifth chapter of Isaiah and began upon the next. She read:

In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.

Rhoda read no farther — the whole earth is full of his glory. — She did not care to read more of the prophet Isaiah to-night. She rose and, like Luke, went to the window and looked out at the night. The scene was no longer one of autumnal rain and dark and raggedness: the new season had brought with it an aspect severe and chaste. The trees stood naked to the frost and snow; the infinite variety of the fields and

meadows and roadside of the summer landscape was blotted out: the land had completely disappeared beneath the pure reaches of snow that swept on and on in measureless rhythm to the forest that met the sky. There, pale clouds touched the thin, purple-grey of the denuded trees. There was no visible source of illumination but over the landscape brooded a half-opaque, silver-grey light.

As she looked out at the night Rhoda did not receive the same inspiration from the scene that she had at like times in other years. Then she had felt that the winter was the season that stressed the personal relationship with God, and she had thought it a symbol of the time when the soul should stand stripped bare before the eyes of God, all things having passed away but the ultimate reality which she had thought was God and the soul. But now she merely looked out upon the brooding silver-grey light and the naked trees and presently turned away.

As Rhoda was about to close her eyes, the moonlight that had been damned back by layers of clouds was suddenly released upon the world, and a flood of thin, palely gleaming light filled

the room. Rhoda felt a little startled. There was something so direct and personal in this sudden illumining of her room, as if this delicate glory was for her alone. She felt a slight excitement stir within her. She raised herself on her elbow and looked out through the window as if to trace the source of the light. She saw that the whole landscape was dimly shining, but more particularly than at the half-brilliance, Rhoda gazed at the great maple above the graves. Its dark, empty arms had caught and held the moonlight whose fluent silver had trickled out upon the grey-brown branches, sharing with them a part of its own starry charm. Rhoda looked at it a long time and she could still see it after she had lain down and closed her eyes.

It may have been a lingering impression of the vision of Isaiah, or perhaps it was the unearthly loveliness and ethereal quality of the moonlight, or it may have been the translated appearance of the maple that fixed in Rhoda's imagination the idea of heaven. But whatever the cause, she presently found herself a guest of God.

The manner of her arrival was not clear.

She did not know whether, like the New Jerusalem before the eyes of John, heaven had descended to her from God, or if she had ascended to it. But that did not seem to matter and she did not find it altogether incredible that she should be there. It was for some good purpose, she knew, that God had made her His guest. She was more moved than astounded at her situation.

Rhoda had recognized her surroundings by her vivid recollection of Saint John's inspired descriptions of the New Jerusalem. As he had said, the light was like that of a stone most precious, as clear as crystal. There were walls and gates all of jasper, as John had said, and streets of pure gold. It had been the pure flaming splendour of the golden streets that had first intimated to Rhoda that she stood in heaven. For a time she was filled with awe, but that sensation gradually gave way to another. Despite the gleaming of gold and the clear shining of jasper that were everywhere, there was no effect of warmth in heaven, so far as she could see, and as Rhoda stood upon the pure gold that shone like clear glass, and as the light that was

like the glory of God filled her eyes, her spirit felt chilled instead of being kindled into flame by all the burning splendour. It was not that Rhoda was oppressed by the unfamiliarity of the scene or by a feeling that it was all too wonderful for her. Once she had accepted the fact that she was in heaven she had been prepared for strange and most marvellous things. But she had not been prepared for the lack of all warmth and intimacy in its glories. Upon earth, when she had tried to picture the brilliance of heaven, she had always thought of the burning beauty of the sunset as typical of the light and those indescribable streets of the New Jerusalem. But there was no suggestion in all that was about her now of the warm glory of earth's sunset. There was a quality in the brilliance of heaven to which she felt she could never familiarize her nature. That quality seemed to be a luminous coldness. She felt it in the light, the light which John had said was the glory of God. Rhoda could not but feel that the glory of God was not the comfort-bringing, rapture-giving essence the mortal spirit craved. At that moment it seemed to Rhoda that the sun-warmed

simplicity of earth gave man more joy and brought him nearer to ecstasy than did all the glory of heaven.

Rhoda was deeply troubled that she should find the atmosphere of the dwelling place of God so joyless and so remote, but suddenly it came to her that she was not prepared to enjoy heaven, being still mortal. If she could see some of the celestial beings and translated souls, she would no doubt find that they were indescribably happy, as she had always pictured them. Instantly another aspect of the heavenly scene was before her: the jasper light was filled with angels and archangels so whitely radiant that Rhoda understood why, in the presence of the Great Brilliance, the seraphims had covered their eyes with twain of their wings. But presently she was able to look at the shining throng more steadily. She drew no reassurance from what she saw. Angels and archangels seemed merely luminous. She could not read in them the slightest part of the happiness she had been accustomed to see upon mortal faces. They were like the gold and jasper city, glorious but cold and remote.

It presently occurred to Rhoda that she had not seen any who had once been mortal. Angels and archangels, she understood, were native to heaven. Perhaps that was why they left her so unmoved: they were too wonderful for her. If she could see some of the translated souls she might feel differently about heaven, for mortals, or they who had once been mortal, surely would not have, even after translation, quite the capacity for glory of beings who had always been celestial, and being less glorious might be happier.

Rhoda realized that she would presently see Angeline and Sarah. She did not know why she was so convinced of it, for she knew the courts of heaven must be thronged with souls, but she knew she was to see them both. She trembled with joy. Of late she had thought about them more and more often. Since her earthly joy and glory had failed her she had looked to the future beyond the mortal life for that rapture her soul desired. She had thought wistfully and a little enviously of Angeline and Sarah who had so long been enjoying what she craved. She prayed that she might be permitted

to remain with them now, that her own translation take place without a return to earth.

While she waited to see Angeline and Sarah, Rhoda experienced a feeling of mingled shame and remorse. She had thought almost bitterly, once or twice of late, of Angeline and Sarah. They had everything in heaven and on earth, while she had been stripped of all. They experienced glory and happiness in heaven and they still possessed a treasure on earth, that treasure that Rhoda had thought was hers. For, when Henry had said, pointing toward the graves beneath the maple, "There are the mothers of this family," she had given her children back to their own mothers. And so she had been stripped of all while Angeline and Sarah retained the things of earth and enjoyed the glories of heaven. But that bitterness passed away from Rhoda as she stood waiting to see her friends of long ago. For that was how she thought of them, as the dear companions of childhood and young-womanhood. Rhoda was almost overcome with joy of what was to come.

The glow and excitement had died in Rhoda; not the faintest gleam or tremor remained. She

had seen Angeline and Sarah. They had been like luminous corpses. The austerity, unearthliness and agonizing aloofness of their dead bodies was still with them. Translation was not what mortals had thought. Angeline and Sarah had shone as did everything else in heaven, and with the same cold radiance. It seemed that only the earth and earth-bound creatures were without that cold and joyless capacity for glory.

Rhoda's sense of loss was almost unbearable. Until that moment she had never felt that she had altogether lost Angeline and Sarah. But now she knew they were gone from her utterly, until, perhaps, that time when her dead body should have been illumined like theirs, and she did not look forward with any joy to that time. For she felt she had nothing in common with the glorified dead. She had had a surfeit of glory: she would no longer desire it in heaven or upon earth. Heavenly glory did not compensate for the earthly qualities that were laid aside. And more, she did not think that heaven itself compensated for the loss of earth. She longed for the warmth of the sunlight, the

green of trees, the brightness of the hearth, and above all, for the look of enjoyment upon human faces. Isaiah's vision of the Lord had been authentic: He was high and lifted up, and as God was, so was heaven. Rhoda recalled that Isaiah had heard one seraphim cry to another that the whole earth was full of God's glory. She was about to deny the truth of the seraphic song, but it came to her that it might be so, that earthly happiness and warmth and beauty might be God's glory in its most simple form, one best suited to mortal's eyes. For upon earth one was conscious of a mystery in life, and perhaps this mystery came because of a mingling of the heavenly and the fleshly in man: for it was very strange that on earth one sensed an ultimate, unbreakable solitude about the spirit, and yet the earthly intimacies were so sweet and precious that one would not voluntarily resign them for the pure celestial state.

First upon arising, as last upon going to bed, Luke looked out at the weather. Glancing cursorily at the sky, Luke thought it was uniformly grey, but looking more closely he saw there were clouds slightly lighter than their back-

ground massed everywhere but in one small spot in the east, just above the horizon, and there, like an exquisite work upon canvas, was a miniature scene of clear, bright blue sky so nearly transparent that the green gold of the sunrise was all but visible through it, upon which blue brightness, as if drawn in charcoal and with an intimate and appreciative knowledge of each limb and branch and twig, the bare trees were limned.

Luke gazed at the delicate brightness of the east and then slowly shook his head. "Too pretty for the rest of the sky," he said aloud to himself. "It'll storm to-day."

Luke was an early riser and this morning had risen at his usual time but early as he was, Rhoda was before him. She was already laying the fire in the stove. Luke watched Rhoda lay the fire as if she had always been accustomed to a stove. He marvelled at her for he did not yet feel on terms of familiarity with it although they had had it some time now. He thoroughly enjoyed making a fire on the old stone hearth which they still used, but he never felt quite as if he knew what he was doing when he worked

about the stove. Perhaps it was because it typified the new life that was awaking all about them, that new life which was for the new generation and in which, Luke was beginning to feel, the old generation would have little part.

Although she knew there were such things to be had as Lucifer-matches, Rhoda still started the fire in the old way, by preserving coals from the day before and by blowing them first into a glow and then into a flame by means of the bellows. Now she took up the bellows but Luke stepped to her side and took them from her He felt at home with them. Presently there was a sound of leaping and crackling within the stove and Luke hung up the bellows and turned to Rhoda. He was amazed, was not quite sure at first if he were altogether awake. Rhoda was her old self again. Her face was serenely bright and happy as he had always known it until a few months ago. The world changed for Luke; suddenly he lost that melancholy feeling of apartness from the life about him. Times might change, he knew they were changing fast, strange things were happening, things too wonderful for him, but still the basis of life had not

changed in the least particular. The things that mattered were the same and always would be. He strode to the stairway door and shouted to Willie and Luke to stir themselves.

Rhoda gazed eagerly into the faces about the breakfast table. She was thirsting for the look of bright, human happiness. Happiness was the one thing of importance, it seemed to her, such happiness as came from the intimacies and tenderness of earthly relationship. Perhaps it was the reflection of her own intense joy that she saw as she looked about her, for she was aglow because she was still in the flesh and upon earth with them who, like herself, were filled with the fleshly capacity for enjoyment of those things which were not so high and lifted up that the simple mortal could not comprehend them. Rhoda had utterly lost her passion for uniqueness of being or experience. It seemed to her far richer to be as other earthly creatures, to share with them their human tenderness and love of warmth and intimacy.

No one seemed surprised when Rhoda said, immediately after breakfast, that she would like to be driven over to the Pearce place some time

that forenoon. "I suppose the walking is too heavy in the woods now," she said to Willie, "so you'll have to hitch the horses to the sleigh."

Willie nodded, looking very much as if he approved Rhoda's intention. As an afterthought he said, "There's not a great deal of snow in the woods yet, but of course you couldn't walk. I'll get the horses ready."

Luke looked a little doubtful. He went to the window and scanned the weather carefully. The brightness had quite died out of the east, the sky was uniformly grey and fine snow was beginning to fall. "You'd better start early," he said as he turned from the window. "We're going to have snow to-day and plenty of it. And if I'm not mistaken there'll be a strong north wind later on."

It made Luke uneasy when one thing after another intervened to delay Willie and Rhoda, for the snow was thickening fast and the north wind which he had expected had set in. "I wish we didn't have to put Young Fanny in," he said to Willie as they got the team ready. "The roads will be too heavy for her, for you know how it blocks between Miller's Corner and the

turn to Henry's place. You'll have to use judgment, Willie, in handling them, for since your mother has taken the notion to go and see Maggie and Henry, I wouldn't want her to have to stay home, but you'll have your work cut out for you getting there."

Rhoda scarcely glanced at the weather as she got into the sleigh. When she had decided to visit Margaret and Henry it had not occurred to her that an obstacle could arise to prevent it. She so felt the need of seeing them both on her own and their account, it did not seem possible anything could prevent. It seemed as necessary and as inevitable that she should go as that the sun should rise at its appointed time. Almost it seemed linked up with cosmic necessity that she should see Margaret and Henry without delay.

At any other time Rhoda would have noticed at once that the colt had been put in, and she would very likely have insisted upon a change or had the horses taken back to the stable. For, in her contacts with animals, Rhoda had felt very much the same consideration and sympathy for them as for human beings. As Saint Francis,

for all his spirituality, could feel a kinship with beasts, so did Rhoda. But to-day her preoccupation was so complete she did not notice that the colt stood at the side of its mother. And she paid no attention whatever to the weather. That was because of the feeling that the elements could not but be for her, that all things must realize the exquisite urgency of her going.

As Luke saw to the tucking in of the blankets and robe he looked apprehensively at the sky now closing in upon them, and as he felt the force and sting of the strengthening north wind and saw that the snow was thickening fast, he frowned uneasily. But as he bade Rhoda and Willie good-bye, for it was expected that they would be making an all-day and perhaps overnight visit, seeing the weather was bad, he was slightly reassured by the bright confidence in Rhoda's eyes, which were all he could see of her face for she was well protected against the storm. Luke had told Sally to see to that.

The storm suddenly increased as Rhoda and Willie started on their way. The sky, now one

great darkening cloud, all but touched the tops of the tallest trees. The light had grown grey and thick for the sun was now no more than a faintly shining disk of silver all but blotted out by the drift of white between sky and earth. More and more, snow became the dominant reality. Thickening, it intervened like a curtain between all solid objects, and this curtain grew rapidly denser. Presently the snow seemed not so much to fall from above as to come scudding horizontally out of the north to rush violently through space or hurl itself against everything that stood above the stretches and drifts of white upon the land. The snow which had been lying upon the branches of the evergreens as upon shelves, was blown violently off and the pines and cedars and tamaracks were freshly drenched with the icy froth spat out by the wind. But it was different with the leafless trees. They bent before the storm and it passed on through them leaving behind little trace of its whiteness and violence.

In winter, when it was necessary to follow the most travelled road, it was a drive of several miles or so from the Botts farm to the Pearce

place. For the first couple of miles or so there was more or less shelter to be had from the thin line of trees along the road or from solid blocks of forest, but farther on the land had all been cleared and the wind had an uninterrupted sweep across the country. Here, wherever there were root fences the snow was caught and piled before them, and where they ran parallel to each other, deep drifts formed between them Because of this a road was broken through the fields but that had not been done so far this winter and Willie would have to attempt the drifts.

It was a little time before Rhoda was fully conscious of the intensity of the storm. But when they had made a little more than a mile she began to realize how severe it was. She looked about as if suddenly awakened. The air was dense with the white violence. Nothing was plainly visible through it. Even the horses, as near to her as they were, seemed to move in a flying white cloud. Rhoda peered at them through the scudding snow. She saw for the first time that the colt had been put in. It was crowding against its mother and lagging slightly

behind. "This won't do at all," she said suddenly. "It's too much for Young Fanny. She'll never have any heart for the road in winter if we put her at more than she's able for now. Could you turn round here?"

Willie stopped the horses, carefully scrutinized the road before and behind and on both sides of them and slowly nodded his head. It was not easy to turn the sleigh in the heavy snow but Willie had a slow, sure way of accomplishing difficult things and finally the horses' heads were turned homeward. "I'm sorry you won't be able to go to see Maggie and Henry to-day," he said to Rhoda, "but it wouldn't have been a good thing to take the heart out of Young Fanny. It'll clear in a day or two and then the roads will be broken through the fields and we'll be able to drive over to Henry's in more comfort than we would have to-day."

Rhoda did not reply. She was scanning the fences carefully. Presently she said, as if to herself, "It looks to me as if the snow wasn't so very deep yet along one side of the root fence between the pasture and the potato field."

"Why no," Willie replied, wondering a little, "it isn't so deep there. The roots make a high fence you know and that keeps the snow from lodging close to it on the sheltered side."

"Just stop the horses here, will you, Willie?" Rhoda said suddenly, her voice brisk. "You go on home, but I think I'll just get out here and walk along the fence till I strike the woods and then it'll be pretty easy going. I don't mind a little heavy walking."

Willie stared in astonishment. Then he said decisively, "You're not going to do any such wild thing as that if I can help it. There's nobody sick at Henry's, I'm sure they're both all right, and there isn't any need of you risking your life to see them to-day."

"Now be calm, Willie, be calm," Rhoda said soothingly. She was used to calming Willie for, despite his sober exterior, his emotions were easily roused and he became excited at such times. "It's foolish to say I'd be risking my life walking along that fence to the woods and then cutting through the woods to Henry's. Once among the trees I'd be out of the sweep of the wind, and so far there hasn't been a very great

deal of snow. The wind is blowing what there is, that's all."

"But you'd get completely done out plowing through the snow," Willie urged, "you know you would."

"I've waded snow before," Rhoda said briefly, so much decision in her voice that Willie was silenced for a moment. But it was not easy to convince Willie against his better judgment or to silence him for long. He made as if to start up the horses as he said, "Besides, you'd perish with the cold. There isn't any use thinking about walking through the woods."

"You don't perish with the cold when you keep going," Rhoda retorted. "Don't get so excited over nothing, Willie. I don't like to see you do it. I think I'll get out down here a little ways and see what I can do."

"What makes you so unreasonable, Mother!" Willie exclaimed, a hint of tears in his voice. That was characteristic of Willie also. Though he seemed all gravity, not to be moved easily by emotions of joy or sorrow, in reality he was the most easily moved to tears of any of the children. Rhoda knew it was because of

his tender heart. She knew that the martinet in him was born of a certain fastidious taste and a meticulous morality.

"Now Willie," she said gently, laying her hand on his arm, "I can't explain just now why I must go and see Maggie and Henry to-day. All I can say is that I feel I must, and Willie, you've trusted to my judgment pretty near all your life and I think you can safely do it again. If I didn't go to-day, before the snow drifts get too deep, it might be a week before I went. I know I can make it through the woods by taking my time and using judgment."

"You might easily lose your way in the woods, if the storm gets much worse," Willie said, almost sobbing.

"Oh no," Rhoda sounded quite confident. "Not while the wind stays where it is, and it isn't likely to change for awhile. Well, I'll be starting now. Good-bye, Willie, and tell them at home not to worry about me for I'll be all right; and have a nice time while I'm gone. You can finish reading them that nice book, the one you got on your birthday."

"Ivanhoe," Willie said, more in his usual

voice. Informing Rhoda as to the name of the book had calmed him a little. He was very fond of giving people information or putting them right. "Well, if you will go, Mother, good-bye and do came back if you see it's going to be too much for you. The road home won't be blocked yet for awhile."

Willie did not start up the horses for a time after Rhoda had got out. He sat watching her, hoping that she would give up after a short struggle with the storm and come back to the sleigh. He thought it was unfortunate that she made the fence so easily. Then she gained the long shelter of the root fence and began on her way to the woods. Reluctantly Willie started the horses, his face puckered with anxiety. But anxious and doubtful as he was, as he thought of Rhoda he began to feel a little reassured. There was a certain power in her, he knew, which had dominion over the things with which she came in contact. He had never seen her alarmed or defeated by any animal. A nervous cow that none of the rest of them could milk in safety was quiet with her; the angriest swarm of bees never molested her though she worked

in their midst; she could persuade old Fanny to see reason when the latter seemed to have made up her mind never again to do so. Willie felt that this force in Rhoda, though it seemed to be derived more from a great sympathy than from power, would now stand her in good stead. Perhaps it was because Willie sensed an underlying unity in all things that he felt that Rhoda's influence over beasts and birds and insects might extend to the elements.

As Rhoda struggled through the storm she thought of nothing but love and happiness. They seemed to her to be the only things in life that mattered. Rhoda's conception of love had broadened; it now included that which Margaret and Henry felt for each other. For she saw that it was the most intimate of all loves, and Rhoda was convinced now that happiness was in proportion to one's closeness to others and not in a rare and starry isolation. If, beneath her breathless impulse toward human intimacies, there lay a recognition of that unassailable spiritual solitude in which every mortal moves no matter how closely he may draw to others, she let it lie unheeded. Or seemed to do

so, for it may have been because she knew there came a time when earthly intimacies would have passed away and the soul have entered into its destiny of starry solitude, it may have been because she felt this that she was so impressed with the urgency of mortals' drawing close to each other while yet the heart and flesh were warm.

With this urgency trembling and glowing within her like a flame responding to the wooing of soft currents of air, Rhoda did not think of the effort she was making as a hazardous and painful thing but as a most exquisite pilgrimage in the service of love.

The great fangs of the roots of which the fence was made no longer looked as if they were bared at the landscape in grotesque and impotent savagery, as they did when there was no snow upon them and they were like the discoloured teeth of gigantic, extinct beasts, but now were graced into fantastic scrolls of purest white. And here and there the storm had brought about other effects not in keeping with its savagery and force. Upon the fields, in certain places, the snow had been

swept into fixed waves which swept on, one after another, in a rhythm strangely appealing to the imagination; or again it had been built into dead-white masses that looked like partly-constructed fortresses with oddly carved walls. These loomed up through the thickening light sometimes half-demolished and again but half-made, according to the varying force of the wind. And while this deluge of snow had made the landscape a white waste, there were a few strange instances of escape from its submerging tide. Singly, or in small, thin groups, slender brown stems of bushes and even of weeds stood up above the snow which, with the determined spirit of dominance of a torrent of lava, sought to drown the land with all upon it. But somehow the frail dried things had been preserved from inundation.

Now and again the heavy booming that filled the air was silenced round about Rhoda, or it seemed to her as if it were; as if the storm had been cleft in two and she stood where the cleavage had been made. Or the uproar would gradually diminish until it had dwindled into a melancholy minor strain with a crooning note

in it, when it began to increase and harshen until again it went bellowing over the waste.

It was as if a war of clouds raged across the fields, so thick and white was the air and so violent the wind, but when Rhoda gained the wood she found comparative calm there. It did not require quite so much of her strength to withstand the storm and make way against it when some part of its force was expended upon the trees and she did not bear the full brunt of it, but the going was exhausting for she gained a step on her way only by pushing her feet and legs forward through depths of snow that reached at times to her waist. When her strength was momentarily spent she leaned against a tree until it flowed back again, or some part of it, into her limbs. But, though there came at last moments when she was not sure there would be sufficient return of strength to enable her to reach her goal, there was within her the serene content of a pilgrim bent upon what he believes to be a most holy mission and, believing so, endures with calm and joy the agonies of his way.

But at last Rhoda saw an open field not far before her and knew she was near her journey's end and that she would have the strength to finish.

Sheltered by a root-fence, Rhoda crossed the field to the house, which lay mellow and secure in the midst of the white violence. She was confident of a welcome there for she knew she brought, enfolded within her heart, the most exquisite of gifts.

THE END

PRODUCED ENTIRELY IN CANADA BY
OVERBROOK
OTTAWA PRESS

THE TIDE OF LIFE

AND OTHER POEMS

by

WATSON KIRKCONNELL

Watson Kirkconnell, author of EUROPEAN ELEGIES, needs no introduction to the Canadian public or should need none.

Most Canadian poetry is pretty and agile; Kirkconnell's poetry is, above all, distinguished by power. Another characteristic is best indicated by a metaphor. Most poets take wing from the ground; here is one who, by a mere gesture, wafts us halfway up a mountain-side and thence takes wing.

Kirkconnell's theme is the eternal one; man's Promethean walk over this earth; he sees beauty, terror, even ugliness, and transforms whatever comes to his hand into an emotional experience. These poems are intensely modern, dealing as they do with such themes as the ravages microscopic germs have wrought in living bodies, the problem of the unemployable unemployed, the disillusionment of marriage and many kindred themes. But they also stand in the great tradition of all literature; for such life as they deal with has been reborn in the spirit before it found utterance here.

That Kirkconnell is a master of the most varied metrical forms, his volume of translations has shown. He is a graduate of Queen's and at present teaches English at Wesley College, Winnipeg.